

King receives U.S. congressman

AMMAN (Petra) — His Majesty King Hussein on Saturday received at the Al Hussein Youth City U.S. Congressman Arlen Specter who is currently on a tour in the region. King Hussein and Mr. Specter reviewed the latest developments in the peace process, particularly on the Palestinian-Israeli track and the exerted efforts to push the peace process forward. The meeting was attended by His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali and Royal Court Chief Awn Khasawneh. Also on Saturday, King Hussein hosted an iftar banquet at Al Hussein Youth City for Royal family members, ministers, speakers of the Senate and the Lower House of Parliament as well as other dignitaries. The King and the attendees performed the Maghreb prayers.

Jordan Times

An independent Arab political daily published by the Jordan Press Foundation
جوردان تايمز يومية سياسية تصدر بالإنجليزية عن المؤسسة الصحفية الأردنية "الراية"

Emirati aid arrives in Iraq

BAGHDAD (AFP) — A ship laden with medical aid from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has arrived in the Iraqi Gulf port of Um Qasr, the official Iraqi news agency INA said Friday. The Cypriot ship, chartered by the UAE, arrived Thursday with 44 containers of medicine, "a gift from Sheikh Mohammad Bin Rashed Al Maktoum, crown prince of Dubai and defence minister of the UAE," the agency said. Over the past two years, the UAE has sent several freighters loaded with food and medical aid for the Iraqi people. The last shipment, which arrived Dec. 6 at Um Qasr, had 31 containers of medicine. The UAE, whose diplomatic relations with Iraq have been frozen since the 1991 Gulf war, has called several times for the lifting of the embargo imposed on Baghdad after it invaded Kuwait in 1990.

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Norway's FM arrives in Amman

AMMAN (J.T.) — Norwegian Foreign Minister Knut Volleback said on Saturday the Oslo accords between Israel and the Palestinians were still valid. Mr. Volleback, who arrived in Amman Saturday for talks on the Middle East peace process with Foreign Minister Fayez Tarawneh and senior Jordanian officials said that he carries no new initiatives to break the current stalemate in peacemaking. The Norwegian minister was received at the airport by Dr. Tarawneh and ministry officials.

Palestinian shot in the leg by Israeli soldiers in Gaza

KHAN YUNES (AFP) — Israeli soldiers shot and wounded a Palestinian who was walking near a Jewish settlement in the Gaza Strip on Thursday night, officials said Friday. Maher Hassan Al Homaydi, aged around 20, was taken to hospital for treatment for a bullet wound in his leg but his condition was not serious, Palestinian officials said. Mr. Homaydi was wounded while he was walking in front of a group of Jewish settlers from Gush Katif, near the Palestinian town of Khan Yunis in the south of the autonomous territory. An Israeli army spokesman confirmed the incident. Another Palestinian was injured by a rock thrown by an Israeli settler on Friday in the West Bank town of Hebron, witnesses said.

Army blows up tunnel between Gaza and Egypt

TEL AVIV (AP) — The Israeli army on Thursday blew up two tunnels dug secretly under the Egyptian-Israeli border. Israel destroyed three other tunnels in recent months, charging that the underground passageways are used to smuggle weapons or people. Israel has urged the Palestinian National Authority to prevent the construction of more tunnels and to destroy any existing ones.

Greece asks U.S. to intervene in Aegean

ATHENS (AFP) — Greece on Friday asked Washington to press Turkey to lower tension in the Aegean Sea, a Greek source said Friday. Greek Deputy Foreign Minister Yannis Kranidiotis asked newly-appointed U.S. Ambassador to Greece Nicolas Burns to persuade Washington to press Turkey to adopt a less confrontational stance in its relations with Greece. Turkey was due to start military manoeuvres Friday which would for the first time take place close to the Greek islands of Andros and Mikonos in the central Aegean, and near Icaria in the east. Greek Defence Minister Akis Tsokhatzopoulos called on Turkey to change its plans but no response had been made by Ankara according to a Greek military source Friday.

'A sovereign decision,' Jordan will attend Turkish, Israeli, U.S. exercises — Lawzi

By Tareq Ayyoub
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Jordan will attend the Jan. 5 military exercises by Turkish, Israeli and U.S. navies in the eastern Mediterranean as an observer, the government said on Saturday.

Nasser Lawzi, acting minister of state for information affairs, told reporters after a regular Cabinet session that the former government of Prime Minister Abdul Karim Kabariti had accepted the invitation to the three-day exercises.

"It is a sovereign decision," Mr. Lawzi said.

He said the size and ranks of the Jordanian team will be announced later.

But the Agence France

Presse (AFP) quoted officials as saying that they expected naval commander, Brigadier General Hussein Khasawneh, to lead the delegation.

The Jan. 5-9 exercises are due to be held in territorial waters and international airspace in line with a military cooperation accord signed between Turkey and Israel in February 1996.

Mr. Lawzi pointed out that Jordan had said it would attend the games, that mainly focus on search and rescue operations in the sea, "shortly after the invitation was extended to the Kingdom." He did not say when the invitation was received.

Turkish Ambassador to Jordan Ahmet Suba Umar told the Jordan Times last week that Ankara had invited the

Kingdom to attend the games adding that regional countries were also welcome.

The games were scheduled for last November but were postponed several times. They have generated widespread protests from Arab and Muslim states.

Both Egypt and Syria have urged Turkey to refrain from any military cooperation with Israel. Iraq and Iran, Turkey's southern neighbours, also criticised the joint exercises.

A Turkish military official told AFP that the most important part of the games, in which the three navies join forces in a mock rescue of a sinking fishing boat, is due to take place on Wednesday.

Israel and Turkey have insisted that the exercises are not intended to be a threat to

any party.

Iraq on Friday condemned the exercises and called for a united Arab front to force their cancellation.

"Iraq vigorously condemns the American-Turkish-Zionist manoeuvres in the Mediterranean... which constitute a provocation directed against the entire Arab Nation," said Foreign Minister Mohammad Said Al Sabah.

Egypt on Wednesday urged Jordan not to take part in the exercises. "Any form of participation in these manoeuvres is undesirable," Foreign Minister Amr Musa said.

Syria's official newspaper Al Thawra said on Saturday that Amman's decision was strange because the manoeuvres are "directed against Arabs and Muslims."

PNA rejects Israel's final status proposal

U.S. accepts Israel's request to delay envoy's visit until Tuesday

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — Only days before a new U.S. peace mission, the Palestinians Saturday rejected Israeli proposals to start talks on the final status of the Palestinian "territories" without resolving key interim issues.

"The implementation of the main issues in the interim stage is the condition for entering the final status negotiations," the Palestinian cabinet said after an overnight meeting, the Wafa news service reported.

The cabinet also insisted that the Israelis go ahead with three troop withdrawals from the West Bank, as required under U.S.-backed peace accords.

Israeli Prime Minister

Benjamin Netanyahu had proposed an additional troop withdrawal only on condition that the Palestinians agree on the postponement of further pullbacks and enter directly into permanent status talks.

"The U.S. has not succeeded in changing the Israeli position and this foretells of bad results," the cabinet said.

The Palestinian rejection left little hope that U.S. envoy to the Middle East, Dennis Ross, would be able to resuscitate the stalled peace process during talks this week with Israeli and Palestinian officials.

The envoy is to prepare for separate meetings the two men are to hold with U.S. President

Bill Clinton later this month. The meeting with Mr. Netanyahu would be held on Jan. 20, his office said Saturday.

Mr. Ross was slated to meet with Palestinian President Yasser Arafat Monday night in the West Bank city of Ramallah, Palestinian officials said.

The United States agreed Saturday to an Israeli request to delay Ross's first meeting with Mr. Netanyahu from Monday until Tuesday as the premier scrambled to overcome a 1998 budget crisis that threatens to topple his fractious right-wing government.

Foreign Minister David Levy, the cabinet's most ardent

supporter of the peace process, threatened to resign Thursday if Mr. Netanyahu did not back down on welfare cuts, and slammed his policy towards the Palestinians as being "on a flight to nowhere" (see story on page 12).

Despite the delay in Mr. Ross's programme, a U.S. official said Washington still believed "it is very important to achieve progress in the peace process as quickly as possible." Mr. Netanyahu's cabinet approved last month the principle of an additional withdrawal from the West Bank

(Continued on page 3)

Israeli armoured vehicle destroyed — Hizbollah

BEIRUT (AP) — Guerrillas opened fire on an Israeli patrol in southern Lebanon on Friday, setting a tank ablaze, Lebanese security officials said.

The officials said there was no immediate word on casualties from the attack on the Bir Kallab outpost, 35 kilometres southwest of the Lebanese capital.

The Hizbollah group said in a statement issued in Beirut that their guerrillas attacked the patrol and an Israeli Merkava tank and that a number of soldiers were killed or wounded.

In response, Israeli soldiers fired mortars, rocket-propelled grenades and 155mm Howitzers at villages facing Bir Kallab, Lebanese security officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

There were no immediate reports on casualties.

Bir Kallab is in Iqlim Al Tuffah an area of southern Lebanon where Hizbollah guerrillas and Israeli forces frequently exchange fire.

There was no immediate word on the incident from the Israeli army.

The Israeli army said, however, that one of its soldiers was lightly wounded early Thursday in a clash with guerrillas in south Lebanon.

The soldier was injured in a clash with guerrillas of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC), a Syrian-backed Palestinian group that opposes the Middle East peace process, Lebanese security officials said.

Hizbollah guerrillas are fighting to force some 1,500 Israeli troops and 2,500 militia allies from an occupied border strip in southern Lebanon. Israel set up the self-declared "security" zone in 1985 as a buffer against cross-border guerrilla raids.

The PFLP-GC has in the past participated in attacks against Israeli troops and their militia allies in south Lebanon.

Rabbis ban Israeli troops in Lebanon from drinking milk

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Rabbis have banned Israeli troops serving in south Lebanon from drinking milk for fear it will get mixed with meat products, breaking Jewish dietary laws, military officials said Friday. The military is trying to find a milk substitute, although some soldiers are secretly bringing in their own milk when they return from leave. Judaism prohibits the consumption of dairy and meat products in the same meal. At military bases in Israel, dairy and meat products are kept in separate refrigerators but it is not possible in Lebanon, officials said. In a commentary in the Masariv newspaper, writer Meir Shalev suggested the rabbinic decree that Israeli troops not be sent to Lebanon anymore "for fear of mixing them with the bullets" of Hizbollah. Hizbollah guerrillas are spearheading the fight to drive Israeli forces out of Lebanon, where the Jewish state occupies a border zone to ward off attacks on Israeli territory.

Unknown gunman shoots at Iraqi senior diplomat

By Tareq Ayyoub
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Rahim Taher, the Iraqi commercial attaché in Jordan, escaped unharm after unknown attackers fired at his car on Saturday morning.

A gunman with a silenced, equipped pistol fired a single shot from an overtake car as Mr. Taher was driving to his office at 7:45 a.m. from his residence in Um Utheina, officials and diplomats said.

Nasser Lawzi, acting minister of state for information affairs, told reporters after a regular weekly Cabinet session that police were still searching for the assailants.

He said no one was arrested in connection with the assault. "We cannot point the finger of accusation at any party until the investigation is over," he said.

"We are dealing with the matter as an ordinary security incident," he added. "We will announce the results of the investigation once they are available to us."

Mr. Taher, 45, is a senior diplomat at the embassy, which monitors a large portion of Iraqi imports routed via Jordan.

Nouri Al Weiss, Iraq's envoy to Jordan, said the attack did not appear to be linked to Iraq's Dec. 8 execution of four Jordanians on charges of smuggling car spare parts out of Baghdad.

Jordan strongly condemned the slayings which dealt a heavy blow to bilateral ties that improved slightly after hitting their lows in August 1995 when Jordan gave asylum to top Iraqi defectors.

Jordan expelled seven Iraqi diplomats from Amman and recalled its charge d'affaires in Baghdad in retaliation for the executions.

"The attack was carried out by some elements who do not want to see any rapprochement in relations between Jordan and Iraq taking place," Mr. Weiss told the Jordan Times.

"There are some parties who are unhappy because ties between Jordan and Iraq started to return to normal... They are trying to fish in troubled waters," he said. He declined to name them.

Baghdad, Jordan's sole supplier of oil, last week agreed to give Amman 96,000 barrels per day in 1998 under an annual protocol.

Mr. Weiss said Iraqi Interior Minister Mohammad Znam

Abdul Razaq also visited Jordan on Thursday and handed officials a full list of 69 Jordanian prisoners held in Iraqi jails — a key Jordanian demand.

He met with Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali and his Jordanian counterpart Nuthir Rashid, he added.

Dr. Majali handed the Iraqi minister a list of 121 Iraqis — detainees and prisoners — held in Jordanian jails.

Baghdad previously said there were 66 Jordanians in Iraqi jails.

Mr. Weiss said the Iraqi dossier also included names of Jordanians who were released by Iraq under a "special official pardon." He declined to elaborate.

Mr. Lawzi said the Jordanian and Iraqi officials also discussed bilateral security cooperation.

He said Mr. Abdul Razaq and Mr. Rashid were expected to meet in the "coming few days" after the end of a meeting of Arab interior ministers in Tunis.

"The two sides agreed to discuss all names and charges of these prisoners... It is premature to discuss the release of these prisoners," said Mr. Lawzi.

Algeria rocked by worst massacre in six years

ALGIERS (AFP) — Algeria's government and military commanders were confronted Saturday with the worst reported massacre in six years of carnage, as newspapers cried "genocide" over the slaughter of around 400 men, women and children.

The death toll reported in two Saturday newspapers marked a dramatic increase from the official count of 78 dead and 68 wounded given by security forces the day after Tuesday's slayings.

The best-selling French-language newspaper Liberte said 412 men, women and children were killed in the attacks in the Relizane region, 250 kilometres southwest of Algiers, while the independent daily Al Watan put the toll at "nearly 400."

Liberte said 176 were killed at Khourba, 113 at Ouled Sahnoun and 123 at Al Abadel and Ouled Taieb.

Victims in the isolated villages first had their throats cut and were then decapitated, Liberte said. Some victims were dismembered and babies were smashed against the walls of houses, it added, citing witnesses.

The assailants arrived around dusk on Tuesday, when the first Ramadan fasting day had just ended, and stayed until dawn.

"The figure advanced by the security services is disputed by accounts from the scene and by journalists, who count nearly 400 dead," Al Watan wrote.

In an editorial, the newspaper urged action from President Liamine Zeroul and warned that Algeria was "facing the genocide of its own people."

It also noted that an official toll from a massacre in August had given the number of deaths as 98, while survivors spoke of up to 300.

The pro-government Authentique admitted that the official toll from the Tuesday night killings "could rise significantly" to around 150.

Algeria has been wracked by unrest since 1992 when the military halted elections which the now-banned



A man reads the independent daily Liberte headlining "Bloody start of Ramadan" and reporting the slayings of more than 400 people Saturday, in Algiers (AP photo)

Islamic Salvation Front was about to win. The bloodshed has been blamed on Islamist extremists.

The London-based human rights group Amnesty International estimates the six-year death toll at more than 80,000.

In the aftermath of Tuesday's killings, security forces swept over the villages, quickly burying victims in makeshift graves, said Liberte.

One witness told the paper he had seen 50 bodies pulled from one house and 30 from another. The journalist interviewed one witness, identified as Ali B., who said his wife and three children had their throats slashed.

A girl of 16 said: "I was kicked and stamped on before I was hit with an axe in the stomach. I don't know how I managed to survive."

None of the perpetrators of Tuesday's killings have been arrested, having melted back into the nearby Ouarsenis hills, whose wooded slopes provide perfect cover for their terrorist operations.

The three massacred villages all lay at separate, isolated spots at the foothills of the Ouarsenis range, their distance from the nearest military posts making them safe targets for the extremists.

Many villages in the region now stand empty, their inhabitants having fled as the armed Islamists moved in.

The inaccessibility of the Ouarsenis hills has frustrated

Algerian army attempts to root out the extremists, who have set up extensive facilities in the area.

A major military sweep operation in May last year uncovered a training camp, dozens of pillboxes with mined entrances and a field hospital.

Meanwhile, the Algerian press Saturday reported more killings.

At least four people died Friday at an illegal checkpoint near Algiers, La Tribune reported. Al Watan said one died and four were injured, while local residents put the death toll at seven.

In Bou Saada, four members of one family had their throats cut overnight Tuesday and two young girls were abducted.

South of Algiers, a civil defence group repulsed a dawn attack by armed men on a village near Chebli. Two or three attackers were killed and a boy of 10 from the village died of his injuries.

"They were wearing Afghan clothes. They were armed with Kalashnikovs and Mahechoucha [sawn-off shotguns]," one witness told Le Matin.

A bomb attack Thursday on a bus in Medea, south of the capital, left one dead and two injured. Al Khabar reported. Another man died in a bomb attack on a shop at Boufaik, also to the south.

جوردان تايمز

U.S. senator says Clinton wants active role in Israel-Syrian peace process

DAMASCUS (AFP) — American Republican Senator Arlen Specter said here Saturday that U.S. President Bill Clinton wants to become an "active participant" in reviving stalled Israeli-Syrian peace talks.

Mr. Specter told reporters prior to a meeting with Syrian President Hafez Al Assad that Mr. Clinton "was preparing to be an active participant and was preparing to invest time in the process."

He said "the question is now how can the U.S. be helpful in promoting the peace process."

There were no immediate details of the discussion between President Assad and Mr. Specter.

But the U.S. senator was reported to be carrying new Israeli offers with him to Damascus. He declined before meeting President Assad to give the nature of the offers, but said that he would discuss them in detail with the Syrian leader.

Following the meeting, the official Syrian news agency SANA only said that talks focused on "the faltering peace process" and "bilateral relations between Syria and the United States."

Mr. Specter and President Assad were joined in the meeting by Foreign Minister Farouk Sharaa and U.S. Ambassador Christopher

Ross, a presidential spokesman said.

Earlier Saturday, Mr. Specter met with Mr. Sharaa in talks the senator said focused on the Israeli-Syrian peace process.

He said they discussed "the possibility of renewing talks on the Syrian-Israeli peace process" and "whether the U.S. can be helpful in bridging the gap between Israel and Syria."

Mr. Specter said he also discussed with Mr. Sharaa the issue of lifting Syria's name from the U.S. State Department's list of countries deemed to be sponsoring terrorism, but cautioned that "there is still a concern in the U.S. that there are terrorist groups in Damascus."

The American senator said he also spoke with Mr. Sharaa on the "recent efforts by the president of Iran to try to open a dialogue with the U.S."

Peace talks between Israel and Syria have been suspended since February 1996, with Damascus demanding a return of the Golan Heights which the Jewish state has occupied since 1967.

Mr. Specter, who chairs the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, visited Syria twice in 1996.

He arrived here from Israel and left later Saturday for Jordan.

Khaddam to visit France

PARIS (AFP) — Syrian Vice President Abdul Halim Khaddam and Foreign Minister Farouk Sharaa are expected in Paris Sunday for talks with French leaders during a two-day visit, officials said here Saturday.

Their talks will focus on recent developments in the Middle East, the deputy spokesman at the foreign ministry Yves Doutriaux told AFP.

Syrian President Hafez Al Assad had stressed the importance of the role of France and Europe in the Middle East peace process when he met France's former Foreign Minister Herve de Charette in November.

Presidential spokesman Gibril Kourieh said at the time that President Assad and Mr. De Charette discussed the "intransigence of the Israeli government regarding the peace process and its refusal to recognise previous engagements" taken by Israel's former Labour government.

Mr. Khaddam and Mr. Sharaa will meet late Sunday with Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine and have talks with President Jacques Chirac on Monday morning. On Tuesday talks with Prime Minister Lionel Jospin were on their agenda, said the spokesman.

Arab diplomats said here the initiative for the visit appears to have come from Damascus.

Mr. Vedrine will visit Damascus, Beirut and Amman later this month.

Peace talks between Israel and Syria and Israel and Lebanon have stalled since early 1996.

Syria said on Dec. 23 that it does not want to negotiate with the current Israeli government because Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu does not recognise his predecessors' commitments.

"When the current Israeli government rejects... the formula of trading land for peace and ignores [former Prime Minister] Yitzhak Rabin's commitment to withdraw from the entire Golan, negotiations are useless and even harmful," Radio Damascus said.

Israel occupied the Golan Heights in the 1967 Middle East war. Syria is demanding a return of the strategic plateau in exchange for a peace treaty.



PALESTINIAN ARRESTED: Israeli soldiers arrest a Palestinian youth after stone-throwing incidents between Jewish settlers and Palestinians erupted in the south West Bank town of Hebron (AFP photo)

Sudan: Eritrea, Uganda planning offensive

KHARTOUM (AFP) — Sudan on Saturday accused neighbouring Eritrea and Uganda of planning a two-pronged offensive against it.

Sudan "is preparing to counter two offensives Eritrea and Uganda are planning on the eastern and western fronts," First Vice President Al Zubair Mohammad Saleh told the independent daily Akhbar

Al Youm. Mr. Saleh said both countries had "concentrated their troops" on the border with Sudan.

"Stepped up security measures have been put in place in and around the town of Kassala in the expectation of an Eritrean offensive," another independent daily Al Rai Al Aam reported.

"The Sudanese army is

patrolling the Khartoum-Port Sudan road and army units have taken up position around Kassala," the paper said.

Sudanese military officials said the Eritrean army had recently moved its headquarters to the Teseney area near the border with Sudan, the paper reported.

Northern Sudanese politicians opposed to the military-backed government of

President Omar Al Bashir formed the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) with southern rebels of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) in the Eritrean capital Asmara in 1995.

Sudan accuses Eritrean forces of assisting the NDA. It has long accused Uganda of helping the SPLA. Uganda in turn accuses Sudan of assisting Ugandan rebel groups.

Iran accuses S. Arabia of withholding pilgrims' visas

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iran says Saudi Arabia is to blame for a delay in issuing visas to Iranian pilgrims wanting to visit Islamic holy sites, the English-language Iran Daily reported Saturday.

An official from Iran's Pilgrimage Organisation told around 50 would-be pilgrims demonstrating outside its offices this week that the fault lay with the Saudi embassy, the paper reported. "Since the mission was shifted to a new location, it had been anticipated that the embassy would have been able to issue the visas in time," he said.

The pilgrims demonstrated for three days this week after only a handful of them were granted visas, Iran Daily said.

"We were at the airport early Monday but only 31 out of the 205 pilgrims managed to get their visas," one pilgrim told the paper.

The Saudi embassy here was not available for comment Saturday.

Israeli woman critically wounded in W. Bank attack

TEL AVIV (AP) — An Israeli woman was critically wounded in a shooting in the West Bank early Thursday, the army said.

Unidentified gunmen in a parked car opened fire on the Israeli vehicle as it passed them near the Palestinian village of Burkin in the West Bank at about 1:30, an army statement said.

The woman, who was sitting in the passenger seat, was critically wounded and taken by army helicopter to the Tel Hashomer Hospital in Tel Aviv, the statement

added. The army put up roadblocks and clamped a curfew on Burkin and the Palestinian village of Adik as troops searched the area for the gunmen.

The attack came as Israel was braced against warnings that Palestinian activists opposed to the autonomy accord could attempt further attacks.

In response to the shooting, Jewish settlers demanded that Israel's 1998 budget allot money to build a bypass road around the area where the attack

took place. Palestinian police later fired a few shots at three Israeli army roadblocks in the southern Gaza Strip, Israel Radio reported.

The shots were in response to shooting by Israeli soldiers at a "suspicious figure" who approached their fortified position, the radio said.

Nobody was hurt in either incident. Five petrol bombs were thrown at Israeli cars at different places of the West Bank, the radio said. Nobody was hurt.

Iraqi paper urges Baghdad to threaten to sever ties with Ankara

BAGHDAD (AFP) — An Iraqi newspaper on Saturday pressed the government to threaten to sever diplomatic ties with Turkey as a gesture of protest over Ankara's "hostile policy" towards Baghdad.

"The condemnation of repeated Turkish military invasions in the north of Iraq is no longer enough. We must threaten to break diplomatic relations with Turkey and halt all trade and economic cooperation," said Babel newspaper run by Iraqi President Saddam

Hussein's son Uday. Babel also called for Arab countries "to apply the agreement for common Arab defence to safeguard the sovereignty of Iraq and its security, which is an integral part of Arab national security."

It added: "Turkey has concluded with Israel a military alliance which not only targets Iraq but all Arabs."

On Friday Iraq condemned the Israeli-Turkish-U.S. military exercises to be held next week in the eastern Mediterranean and

urged forging a united Arab front to force their cancellation.

Iraq Foreign Minister Said Al Sahhaf called the manoeuvres "a provocation aimed against the Arab Nation."

Iraq on Thursday also accused Turkey of deploying its troops in Kurdish areas of northern Iraq to "carry out an American-British plot against Baghdad [intended] to perpetuate the abnormal situation in the north."

Iraq has repeatedly

accused Turkey of violating its sovereignty and demanded last month that Turkey withdraw immediately from its northern territory, saying it "reserves the right to take measures aimed at protecting its territory and national sovereignty."

Turkey has conducted several incursions into northern Iraq, operations it says are aimed at the Kurdish Labour Party (PKK) which is fighting for self-rule in south-eastern Turkey and maintains rear bases in northern Iraq.

Six Bahrainis confess to arson attack in Manama — report

MANAMA (AFP) — Six Bahrainis have confessed to an arson attack on a furniture shop in the capital Manama a week ago which destroyed the building but did not cause any casualties, a newspaper reported Saturday.

"The six had made a detailed confession of the attack before an investigating judge," the English-language Gulf Daily News said, citing a public security official.

One of the gang members used an iron bar to smash the window of the shop in a five-storey building and poured petrol over the furniture before setting it ablaze before dawn last Sunday.

"The saboteurs were arrested after a thorough investigation. They will appear before the court once legal procedures have been completed," the newspaper said.

The building, located in

Manama's western suburb of Sahla, was gutted, causing damage estimated at \$6.75 million, according to a company official.

Bahrain has been hit by a wave of arson attacks since the start of the political unrest, in January 1994, led by Shiite opposition figures seeking the restoration of parliament dissolved in 1975.

At least 38 people have been killed so far in the unrest.

JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel. 773111-19

PROGRAMME TWO

14:00 Holy Koran
14:10 Cartoon
14:30 French Programmes
16:15 Prayers - Believe and Behave
17:00 Energy Express
17:30 Tarzan
18:30 News Headlines
18:35 America's Funniest Video
19:00 News in French
19:15 Ramadan Talks
20:01 Dadd's Army
20:30 Killing for a Living
21:00 Renegade
22:00 News at Ten
23:15 North and South
23:15 The Jewel in the Crown
24:00 Islam in a changing world

PRAYER TIMES

05:10 Fajr
06:32 (Sunrise) Duha
11:40 Dhuhur
14:26 'Asr
16:49 Maghreb
18:11 'Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church
Sweifeh, Tel. 810740
Assemblies of God Church Tel.
632785.

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

St. Joseph Church Tel. 624590
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 637440.

De la Salle Church Tel. 661757.
Terra Sancta Church Tel. 622366
Anglican Church Tel. 652826.

Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 771331.
Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 775261.

St. Ephraim Church Tel. 771751.
Armenian International Church Tel. 865897

Evangelical Lutheran Church Tel. 824328.
German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 688404

The Latter-Day Saints Tel. 654932.
Church of Nazareth Tel. 675691.

The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 811295
English-speaking
Latin Catholics Parish Tel. 614190.

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology
Weather will be cold and skies will be partly cloudy with a chance of scattered showers. Winds will be southeasterly moderate. In Aqaba

winds will be northerly moderate and seas calm.
Min/Max temp.

Amman 6/10
Aqaba 14/20
Deserts 5/12
Jordan Valley 14/20

Yesterday's high temperatures:
Amman 9, Aqaba 19 Humidity readings: Amman 57 per cent, Aqaba 35 per cent.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:
Dr. Fakher Bilbesi 552223
Dr. Adnan Zaghloul 898140
Dr. Fayed Dabbas 759155
Dr. Mazin Ntali 830435
Firas pharmacy 661912
Ferdows pharmacy 778336
Al Asema pharmacy 637055
Nairoukh pharmacy 623672
Al Salam pharmacy 636730
Yacoub pharmacy 644945
Shmeisani pharmacy 637660
Najib pharmacy 847632
IRBID:
Dr. Ahmad Qanu 281484
Al Quds pharmacy (-)

ZARQA:
Dr. Zuhour Al Qadi 906606
Khalifeh pharmacy 98541

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre 637111
Civil Defence Department 661111
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue 630341
Rescue Police 192, 621111, 637777
Fire Brigade 617101
Blood Bank 775121
Highway Police 843402
Traffic Police 896390
Public Security Dept. 630321
Hotel Complaints 605800
Price Complaints 661176
Water & Sewage Complaints 897467
Amman Municipality Complaints 787111
Telephone Information (directory assistance) 121
Overseas Calls 010230
Central Amman Telephone Repairs 623101
Abdali Tel. Repairs 661101
Jordan Television 773111
Radio Jordan 774111
Water Authority 680100
J. Electricity Authority 815615
Electric Power Co. 636381
RJ Flight Information 08-53200
Queen Alia Int. Airport 08-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:
Hussein Medical Centre 81381332
Khalidi Maternity 642281/6
Akileh Maternity 642441/2
Jabal Amman Maternity 642362
Malhas, J. Amman 636140
Palestine, Shmeisani 607071
Shmeisani Hospital 669131
University Hospital 845845
Al-Muasher Hospital 667227/9
The Islamic, Abdali 666126/27
Al-Ahli, Abdali 664164/6
Italian, Al-Muashreen 777101/3
Al-Bashir 775111/26
Army, Marka 891611/15
Queen Alia Hospital 602240/50
Amal Hospital 674155
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery 865199
ZARQA:
Zarqa Govt. Hospital 09/983323
Zarqa National Hospital 09/900560
Ibn Sina Hospital 09/986732
Al Hikma Modern Hospital 09/990990
IRBID:
Princess Basma Hospital 02/275555
Greek Catholic Hospital 02/272275
Ibn Al Nafees Hospital 02/247100

AQABA:
Princess Haya Hospital (03)314111

FOR THE TRAVELLER

QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. (44) 53200-5, where it should always be verified. Information on other flights can be supplied on phone (44) (52700)

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
08:25 Bombay (RJ)
08:35 Jeddah (RJ)
09:15 Bangkok, Dubai (RJ)
09:50 Dubai, Abu Dhabi (RJ)
11:00 Beirut, Larnaca (RJ)
11:05 Riyadh, Dhahran (RJ)
16:00 Madrid (RJ)
16:45 New York, Amsterdam (RJ)
17:00 Brussels, Geneva (RJ)
17:05 Paris (RJ)
17:45 London (RJ)
18:05 Athens (RJ)
20:15 Frankfurt (RJ)
22:50 Vienna, Aqaba (RJ)

Other Flights
03:25 Rome (AZ)
10:00 Sanaa (IY)
11:00 Riyadh (add) (SV)
12:25 Bahrain (GF)
13:00 Moscow (SU)
15:00 Doha (QR)
17:45 Jeddah (SV)
20:00 Tel Aviv (LY)
20:10 Beirut (ME)
20:40 Cairo (MS)
23:10 Istanbul (TK)

DEPARTURES

Royal Wings (RW)
07:45 Aqaba (RW)
09:05 Amman (QAIA) (RW)
09:50 Amman (Marka Airport) (RW)
17:30 Tel Aviv (RW)
18:30 Amman (QAIA) (RW)
21:20 Aqaba (RW)
22:50 Amman (Marka Airport) (RW)
Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
10:30 Frankfurt (RJ)
10:50 Aqaba, Vienna (RJ)
12:00 Amsterdam, New York (RJ)
12:15 London (RJ)
12:45 Athens (RJ)

01:00 Aqaba, Rome (RJ)
18:45 Jeddah (RJ)
20:10 Cairo (RJ)
20:15 New Delhi (RJ)
20:40 Damascus (RJ)
21:00 Abu Dhabi, Dubai (RJ)
22:30 Bangkok (RJ)
22:45 Sanaa (RJ)
00:50 Jeddah (RJ)
01:15 Jakarta (RJ)
02:00 Kuala Lumpur (RJ)

Other Flights
03:00 Athens (OA)
04:20 Rome (AZ)
06:15 Beirut (ME)
06:40 Beirut, London (BA)
07:50 London (BA)
11:00 Sanaa (IY)
13:15 Doha (GF)
14:50 Moscow (SU)
16:00 Doha (QR)
19:15 Jeddah (SV)
21:20 Tel Aviv (LY)
21:40 Cairo (MS)

Royal Wings (RW)
06:45 Amman (Marka Airport) (RW)
08:15 Aqaba (RW)
09:30 Amman (QAIA) (RW)
16:45 Amman (Marka Airport) (RW)
17:35 Tel Aviv (RW)
20:30 Amman (QAIA) (RW)
21:50 Aqaba (RW)

Nadia Nicolas died late Friday at the King Hussein Medical Centre's intensive care unit (ICU), where she was receiving treatment for serious injuries from Wednesday's crash, they added. Her husband, Samir Jerje, was still recovering at the hospital's ICU.

Moi wins Kenyan presidential race — electoral commission

NAIROBI (AFP) — Kenyan President Daniel Arap Moi was set for a return to power after claiming a new five-year mandate in elections here, the country's electoral commission chief said Saturday.

Tallies from 190 of Kenya's 210 constituencies earlier underlined Mr. Moi's unassailable lead in the vote, which took place Monday and Tuesday.

"If the calculations are right, he (Moi) has the majority votes and he has the 25 per cent in at least five provinces," Samuel Kivuiti told a news conference.

"There is nothing wrong with that person being declared president. That is my interpretation," he added.

But he said the law forbade him from declaring the winner until returns had been received from all the constituencies.

The provisional results gave Mr. Moi 2,412,044 votes to 1,789,206 for his nearest rival, Mwai Kibaki, the head of the Democratic Party and a former vice-president.

Raila Odinga of the National Development Party (NDP) had 707,528 votes and Michael Kijana Wamalwa (FORD-Kenya) had 511,343.

Mr. Kibaki and Odinga have alleged large-scale vote rigging and called for fresh elections.

But Mr. Kivuiti said the polls were "substantially free and fair," and put the turnout in most constituencies at 65 to 85 per cent.

Mr. Moi took more than 25 per cent of the vote in five provinces, meeting a stipulation that a first-round winner must win a minimum of one quarter of the vote in at least five of Kenya's eight provinces.

His Kenya African National Union (KANU) also claimed to have maintained its majority in parliamentary elections which were held on the same days.

A large majority of Kenyans voted for KANU and the opposition does not have the right to dictate to the election commission what to do, the party told a news conference.

KANU had 101 seats and the combined opposition

98: Democratic Party 35, NDP 21, FORD-Kenya 19, SDP 14, FORD-People three, Safina three, FORD-Asili one, Shirikisho one and Kenya Social Congress one.

Safina leaders Richard Leakey and Paul Muite urged political parties to start negotiations on comprehensive constitutional reforms that would pave the way for fresh elections and described the latest polls as a "disaster", the East African Standard newspaper reported.

KANU spokesman Bonaya Adhi Godana rejected claims of rigging, saying repeat elections would not be held "to satisfy the egoistic ambitions of the likes of Kibaki and Odinga."

Mr. Kivuiti said he had not received any official complaints which would prevent him from declaring the winner in the presidential poll.

In the last parliament, Mr. Moi used his privilege as president to nominate 12 KANU supporters as MPs, but in the next one he will have to appoint the extra

members from among parties based on their parliamentary showing.

The new rule was part of a constitutional reform package designed to make the elections fairer. Moderate MPs on both sides of the house pushed it through in November after political violence in this East African country had claimed more than 100 lives.

Mr. Moi, one of the last of the old-guard African presidents, ran on a platform of stability and continuity in a region wracked by civil wars and genocide.

His opponents hammered on the themes of rampant corruption, brutal urban crime, a decaying infrastructure and deficient health and education services.

The whole election was supposed to have started and finished Monday, but chaotic delays saw the polling extended to Tuesday in many areas and even to Wednesday in some.

At least 11 people died in election clashes, including four shot by security forces.



Recent picture, taken on Dec. 29, 1997, of Kenyan President Daniel Arap Moi being greeted by his supporters during an election rally in Aringo, Western Kenya (AFP photo)

Taleban spell out fresh agenda for Afghan peace talks

KABUL (AFP) — Afghanistan's hardline Taleban militia Saturday offered a fresh agenda for opening talks with their northern rivals to end a bitter civil war, hailing the move as an "important step."

A Taleban spokesman, Wakil Ahmad Mutawakil, said there would be "high hopes" for efforts to end the country's 18-year-old civil war, if the northern anti-Taleban alliance agrees to select and honour the decisions of a group of senior religious scholars.

"We will select Ulema (scholars) after the opposition have, and also when we are sure the opposition will declare their respect for the decisions of the scholars," Mr. Mutawakil declared.

He said that when both sides had selected their representatives, the religious scholars could then meet to decide an agenda for talks. Speaking by telephone from the southern Taleban stronghold of Kandahar, Mr. Mutawakil said the talks should be based on Islamic law and not politics.

"This is a very important step: in all of Afghan history major decisions have been made by Ulema and we hope the Ulema will find a solution to the Afghan problem," he said.

The spokesman said there were no further demands or preconditions for talks — such as finding a neutral meeting place or exchange of prisoners — which prior to now have formed major stumbling blocks.

He added that rather than sending Taleban leaders, many of whom have spent years in religious training and hold top Islamic titles, the militia would select "very senior religious scholars."

The Taleban declaration follows an offer by ousted Kabul President Burhanuddin Rabbani to solve the seemingly intractable conflict through a meeting of religious elders rather than fac-

tion leaders.

However, the opposition — which in 1997 twice frustrated determined Taleban attempts to seize the north — have yet to reveal when they will begin selecting their representatives.

The moves follow a year of massive fighting by the two sides, which despite great loss of life has left the frontlines largely unchanged.

Political analysts here have reacted positively to the initiative from the two sides.

"The opposition have so far held back their demands for the demilitarisation of Kabul, which suggests a major change in the political climate," a Western analyst said.

"In addition, the Taleban have toned down their rhetorical determination to impose their rule on the north, which also shows a major change in tack within the movement," he added.

According to Afghan watchers, the fresh initiative and a frustrated stalemate coupled with mounting foreign concern could soon help end the country's seemingly intractable war.

"With ties growing between Taleban-backed Pakistan and fierce opponents of the Sunni militia in Iran, the geopolitical picture is also changing in favour of peace," a foreign diplomatic source said.

The Islamic militia controls two thirds of Afghanistan, including the capital Kabul, and has vowed to impose its strict interpretation of Islamic Sharia law throughout the country.

It recently declared the country an emirate ruled by the militia's leader mullah Mohammad Omar, who is known to the loyalists as the Amirul Mohimne (leader of the faithful).

The northern provinces are controlled by a coalition including Mr. Rabbani's chief Commander Ahmad Shah Masoud, ex-Communist and ethnic-Uzbek warlord Abdul Rashid Dostan and two Shiite Muslim factions.

East Timor's Nobel laureate calls for an end to armed struggle

SYDNEY (AFP) — Nobel laureate Jose Ramos Horta admitted Saturday that East Timorese leaders whom he has represented for 23 years, made mistakes in the past and called for an end to armed struggle.

Writing in the International Herald Tribune, he urged his comrades in the resistance movement to cease fighting and pursue a non-violent strategy of the sort "inspired by the great men of this century."

The Sydney-based diplomat, who has represented the East Timorese freedom movement at the United Nations since East Timor was invaded by Indonesia in 1975, also forecast the imminent collapse of the government of Indonesian President Suharto.

Mr. Horta, who shared the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize with Roman Catholic Bishop Carlos Belo, could not be reached for comment Saturday, but he is not known to have previously admitted errors by his side or urged an end to violent struggle.

He called on the international community to press harder for a peaceful solution to the conflict in East Timor, in which tens of thousands of people have died since it was invaded and occupied by Indonesia.

Mr. Horta, who met South African President Nelson Mandela for talks in South Africa last year, said his people had experienced brutality of genocidal proportions, with the loss of around one third of its population.

"Our culture has been severely damaged, our people marginalised by the Indonesian immigrants, their land taken and the environment destroyed," he said.

Indonesia, he said, had suffered increasing international opprobrium and now faced a looming recession following the collapse of its currency since mid-1997.

"It is now clear that the end of his regime is near and East

Timor's freedom is in sight."

Both sides, he said, should "reflect on the East Timor tragedy and seek a negotiated settlement."

"We East Timorese leaders must have the courage and humility to acknowledge our share of the tragedy."

Recalling the events leading up to the invasion, he said Indonesia could not escape blame for the political tensions and the 1975 civil war as its military intelligence sought to inflame and divide the territory.

"But East Timorese leaders too, sometimes acted with understandable immaturity and at other times with reckless irresponsibility."

"We were the ones who unleashed a civil-war that caused the deaths of hundreds of our own people. Some in Fretilin were particularly violent during that period, creating deep divisions and resentment in East Timor."

"Indonesia must improve the situation in East Timor. Political prisoners should be released; the widespread human rights violations must stop and Indonesian troop reductions should be carried out."

Such steps, he argued could lead to local autonomy and eventually a referendum on self-determination for East Timor under U.N. auspices in work out the final status of the territory.

"The East Timorese resistance must cease their activities and pursue a non-violent strategy inspired by the great men of this century: Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King and the Dalai Lama."

"As Indonesia faces an increasingly difficult future, it cannot afford the economic and diplomatic costs of a continuing occupation of East Timor."

More effort was required by the international community to push Indonesia to "cut its losses in East Timor."

Burundi army mobilises Hutus to track down rebels

BUJUMBURA, Burundi (AP) — Scores of Hutu men mobilised Saturday to help Burundi's Tutsi-led army track down Hutu rebels suspected of an attack in which 300 people were killed and another 7,000 displaced.

Army spokesman Lt. Col. Mamert Sinarinzi said the Hutu survivors of the attack Thursday at Rukaramu settlement and a nearby army camp 6 kilometers south of the capital Bujumbura joined the soldiers in combating the area for the rebels.

He emphasised that the Hutu men had voluntarily joined the search operation because they had been targeted in the attack. In the past, international human rights organisations have accused the army of using Hutu civilians as human shields against rebel attacks.

It was difficult to confirm the reports independently, because the army had barred all reporters except those from state-controlled television from the scene, claiming it was too dangerous.

Up to 200 civilians died in the fighting, most of them women and children, Lt. Col. Sinarinzi said. Four government soldiers and at least 100 rebels were also killed, he said.

The civilians appeared to be in the path of a Hutu rebel retreat. It was not clear whether they were caught in cross-fire between government troops and rebels.

In the past, the rebels, fighting to overthrow the Tutsi-dominated government, have killed Hutu civilians whom they accuse of denying them shelter, money and recruits to the

rebel ranks.

The rebels and the army have been locked in conflict since the October 1993 assassination of Burundi's first democratically elected president, a Hutu, by Tutsi paratroopers. More than 150,000 people, most of them civilians, have been killed since.

A former president and retired Tutsi major, Pierre Buyoya, seized power in a July 1996 coup. Tutsis make up 14 per cent of Burundi's population of 6 million but traditionally have controlled the government, military and economy. Hutus make up 85 per cent.

Lt. Col. Sinarinzi said the attack, the boldest in many months, was the work of the National Liberation Front, the armed wing of the extremist Hutu party Palipehutu.

Clinton to request more research, social funds — report

WASHINGTON (AFP) — President Bill Clinton will ask Congress for more money for biomedical research and social programmes in his upcoming annual budget proposal, news reports indicate.

Top members of the government-run National Institutes of Health (NIH) have told Congress they need more support for biomedical research because managed-care health companies have reduced the amount of money they have allocated to clinical trials of possible treatments, the New York Times reported Saturday.

Members of Congress are likely to approve an even larger amount than that requested by the president, legislators told the newspaper.

Both Democrats and Republicans are sympathetic to the idea because the research is popular among voters — and 1998 is an election year, the newspaper reported.

The NIH budget has doubled over the past ten years to its current \$13.6 billion. Some lawmakers told the newspaper they would like to double that budget within the next five years.

Mr. Clinton also wants to expand current social programmes by reducing the minimum age at which retirees can get federal medical benefits known as Medicare, as well as restoring food stamp programmes to immigrants, the Washington Post reported.

Under the proposal, Medicare benefits would be extended to retirees at ages 62 to 64. Currently the benefits are only available to those 65 and older.

Immigrants had access to food stamps — federal vouchers for the poor to buy food — until it was denied them when welfare rules were overhauled by Congress in 1996.

Mr. Clinton will formally submit his 1999 budget to Congress in early February.

British veteran comedy writer Frank Muir dies at 77

LONDON (AFP) — Veteran comedy writer and broadcasting personality Frank Muir died Friday at the age of 77, his wife said.

He became famous as one of the participants of the British TV quiz show "Call my Bluff."

Frank Muir died after watching Oscar-winning movie Forrest Gump at home.

"We saw the film together and he enjoyed it. He hadn't been well over Christmas and had complained how lousy he was feeling just an hour before he died", said his wife Polly, 72.

"But he went peacefully in his own bed. We don't know the cause of death. There will be a post-mortem", she said.

Muir, born in Ramsgate, Kent, in 1920, enjoyed a partnership lasting a quarter of a century with Denis Norden. Together they produced such classics as Take It From Here, The Glums, My Word! and My Music.

In the 1960s, Muir ran the BBC's sitcom department and was involved in producing some of the best TV series of the time, including Steptoe and Son and Till Death Us Do Part. Later he

joined London Weekend Television as head of entertainment.

He was the author of some 30 books and several documentaries — as well as the hand that guided that notorious chauvinist comic character, Alf Garnett.

Frank Muir's death came just three months after he published his memoirs, "A Kentish Lad." His funeral is expected to be held near his home in Thorpe, Surrey.

Frank Muir married Polly McIlvaine in 1949. She survives him with a son, Jamie, and a daughter, Sally.

U.S. Army to hand back Hitler's desk

BONN (AFP) — The U.S. army is to return Hitler's desk and other furniture from his Bavarian holiday lair to German authorities, the news magazine Der Spiegel reported.

In its Monday edition, the weekly magazine said the army promised "to restore all the property to the Federal German state at the right time."

It would then be up to authorities in Bavaria, Germany's largest state, to decide what to do with the goods.

The U.S. Army occupied Hitler's mountain retreat at Berchtesgaden, near the border with Austria, for nearly 50 years after World War II.

In its heyday, the Berghof

was Hitler's favourite home. As the virtual second seat of the Third Reich, it welcomed visiting statesmen and hosted conferences of war dealing with Nazi death camps and battle plans.

The Berghof was deserted by U.S. troops in 1995.

In 1987, Der Spiegel reported, the army thought about moving the furniture to a museum in the United States, but gave up the idea as too damaging to its reputation.

The property is now being stored at Heidelberg, the southwestern town that is the headquarters of U.S. forces still in Germany, and a Bavarian depot.

Chris Farley dies of drug overdose

WASHINGTON (AFP) — The late U.S. comic actor Chris Farley died of a lethal drug overdose, the Cook County coroner in Chicago reported.

Farley, who appeared on the long-running Saturday Night Live television show and later starred in the movies Tommy Boy, Black Sheep and Beverly Hills Ninja, was found dead in his Chicago apartment on Dec. 18.

The coroner's office reported that Farley, 33, died after taking an overdose of cocaine and morphine.

Chinese dissident calls for reversal of economic reforms

BEIJING (AFP) — Veteran dissident Xu Shuliang called Saturday for greater political freedom in China and for the government to reverse its plan to allow state-owned enterprises to fail.

Mr. Xu, a prominent thinker of the 1978-79 Democracy Wall movement, called on Chinese President Jiang Zemin to prevent social turmoil by reversing reforms adopted at the 15th Communist Party congress in September. The congress advocated sweeping reform of the state-owned enterprises, which would allow unprofitable companies to fail if they couldn't merge with more successful partners. The reforms are expected to put millions out

of work.

"The most volatile situation at the moment is the increasing number of unemployed workers," Mr. Xu said in a letter faxed to AFP.

"Throw away the reforms of 1997 and come up with a new set of resolutions targeted at helping laid-off workers and poor farmers," he said.

Mr. Xu also complained the plight of poor rural farmers has been overlooked by the government, and that they have been subjected to discrimination.

"The government is oppressing and discriminating against peasants. They are treated like second-class citizens," he said.

The hukou, or residence card, that rural villagers

must carry, like all Chinese citizens, forces them to remain in the countryside and prevents them from finding more lucrative jobs in the cities, he said. China restricts migration from rural to urban areas as part of an attempt to prevent urban unemployment from swelling.

Last week, Mr. Xu wrote another petition demanding that the government allow workers to set up their own, non-government-run unions, which are currently illegal in China.

Also Saturday, dissident Qin Yongmin, who has spent a total of ten years in jail since 1980 for his active criticism of the government, wrote a petition to Mr. Jiang demanding democracy and

freedom of speech in China. His letter repeats an earlier call last week.

"The police can cut my phone line and my fax line, but they cannot stop the people's desire for democracy," he wrote.

He said that Mr. Jiang cannot depend on the army and police to keep himself in power, but must allow people to choose their leaders.

Since Chinese authorities freed long-time dissident Wei Jingsheng on medical parole in November, letters from dissidents across China have multiplied. The letters cover a range of demands, from the early release from prison for fellow dissidents or themselves, to the formation of free labour unions, to outright democracy.

British army resumes joint patrols with N. Ireland police

BELFAST (AFP) — The British army resumed joint patrols with Northern Ireland police on the streets of Belfast in the early hours Saturday to contain a surge in sectarian violence.

Friday, police announced the resumption of joint daytime street patrols to counter renewed violence a month to the day after the patrols were dropped. Although the announcement referred to daytime patrols, a police spokesman said the joint patrols could be undertaken at any time of the day or night, if needed.

Police in Northern Ireland also announced tighter security in sensitive areas, particularly those with a majority Catholic population, following threats from the staunchly pro-British Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF).

The LVF has claimed responsibility for two killings in retaliation for the murder last week of LVF leader Billy Wright, who was shot by republican gunmen in the top-security Maze prison just outside Belfast.

The joint patrols had been

scrapped in the whole of Belfast on Dec. 2 as a gesture to participants in the Northern Ireland peace process. A week earlier, patrols were suspended in the Catholic area of west Belfast.

Announcement of the resumption followed talks between Northern Ireland Secretary Mo Mowlam, Royal Ulster Constabulary chief Ronnie Flanagan and security advisors on urgent security measures following the sectarian killings.

"We are there in numbers to protect people but we need assistance in order to ensure that protection is properly effective. I can't say at this stage there is no risk of further attack," Mr. Flanagan said. The bloodshed raised fears of a spiral of tit-for-tat shootings which could derail ongoing peace talks and plunge the province back into the daily diet of violence it knew before the first Irish Republican Army (IRA) ceasefire in 1994.

Mr. Wright's slaying was claimed by the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), a dissident republican group.

Hong Kong voters shy away from first election under Chinese rule

HONG KONG (AFP) — More than a million of Hong Kong's eligible voters have shunned a high-profile campaign to register for the territory's first Legislative Council election under Chinese rule.

The public put down to Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa's call for a strong turnout has led to a threat by Electoral Affairs Commission Chairman Woo Kwok-hing that registration may be made compulsory.

Less than two weeks before registrations close, more than a million names are missing from the rolls despite the 60 million Hong Kong dollar (\$7.7 million) sign-on campaign.

As Mr. Tung announced the election would be held on May 24, Mr. Woo admitted he was "disappointed" in the reaction of voters to an election which will be closely watched around the world.

"With two more weeks to go before the registration deadline closes on Jan. 16, more than a million eligible people have yet to sign up as electors," Mr. Woo said in a statement.

Although some four million people in Hong Kong are eligible to vote, only 2.54 million registered to be on the electoral roll at the last Legislative Council election under British rule in 1995.

Last month, 30,000 voter-registration "ambassadors" knocked on every door in the territory in an attempt to rouse interest in the election.

Of the two million households visited, the occupants of 720,000 homes either refused to register or were not at home, Mr. Woo said without breaking down the figures.

"While the government has spared no effort to make it convenient for every eligible resident to exercise their civil rights, I am rather disappointed that so many people are so

apathetic towards such an important election to everybody in Hong Kong.

"If people continue to remain indifferent and do not come forward to register themselves as electors and exercise their right, I believe that the government may have to consider introducing compulsory registration."

Mr. Tung, keen to show the world an open and fair election, said when launching the registration campaign that "massive participation" was required for the poll to be seen as successful.

In September he went to the United States to promote the poll which had been widely criticised after a law change restricted hopes for full democracy.

Of the 60 seats in the legislature only 20 are up for general election, with the remainder to be filled from small special-interest, or functional, constituencies and by direct appointment.

Of the functional constituencies, the agriculture and fisheries sector had drawn only seven voters as of Dec. 30, the South China Morning Post reported Saturday. The Post said the low numbers "threaten to cast a shadow over the whole electoral process," and questioned whether the level of interest "reflects disillusion with the way the electoral process has been shaped for political ends."

The Legislative Council will replace the Provisional Legislature installed by China when it scrapped the British era fully-elected council on resuming sovereignty of the territory on July 1 last year.

For the final two weeks before registration closes, the government is to target tertiary institutions as well as setting up registration counters at bus and train terminals.

2 killed as gales batter northern Spain

MADRID (AFP) — Two people were killed Friday in gales which battered the Asturias region of northwestern Spain for the past two days, security officials said.

A 67-year-old farmer was killed at Siero when a wall he was building fell on him while in the town of Carreño, a worker died

after falling from a roof. At Puerto de Vega in the same region, about 10 fishing boats anchored in the port sank in the rough seas.

In San Sebastian in the Basque country, the promenade along the sea front was closed because of high waves which injured four people there Thursday.



William Straw, the 17-year-old son of Britain's Home Secretary Jack Straw, poses for a photographer at his family home in London (Reuters photo)

British minister hard on drugs despite son's arrest

LONDON (AFP) — British Home Secretary Jack Straw resurrected his headline anti-drugs stance Saturday despite national headlines revealing his 17-year-old son had been arrested for allegedly selling cannabis to an undercover tabloid journalist.

Questioned on BBC radio on whether his position on cannabis had changed following his son's arrest, Mr. Straw said: "If they can prove this drug is not (narcotic and dangerous), of course we will have to think about it again."

"But there has been no evidence whatsoever to undermine the scientific evidence that this is a potentially dangerous drug and of course it should not be legalised."

He added though that if cannabis was proved to have medicinal benefits, then it should be available for those ends.

The media storm unleashed on Britain's front pages Saturday follows the High Court's decision late Friday to lift legal restrictions on identifying Mr. Straw's son William, who is considered a minor under English law.

Scottish, Irish and French papers had already identified both Mr. Straw and his son.

The Mirror tabloid newspaper reported Dec. 34 that one of its reporters had bought 10 pounds' (\$16)

worth of cannabis from a cabinet minister's son in a London pub.

Subsequent reporting in England's papers, because of legal restrictions, avoided naming the father and son, although techniques such as juxtaposed photographs gave strong hints.

The incident was particularly frustrating for news editors given Mr. Straw's hard-hitting policies against juvenile delinquents, youths and drugs, and parents he considered too lax in bringing up their children.

Mr. Straw resolutely refused to resign and received the strong backing of Prime Minister Tony Blair.

As one of his colleagues in the Labour Party, Paul Flynn, said Saturday: "I think he is in an impossible situation, and an embarrassing situation, but that doesn't mean he should go," he said.

Surprisingly, while the opposition Conservative Party has been making political capital out of the scandal, the calls for Mr. Straw's resignation have not been unanimous.

Senior Conservative Party member Brian Mawhinney said on radio that Mr. Straw should "talk to his colleagues and his family" about whether he can continue in his portfolio, but drew short of publicly demanding he step down.

Family and friends of Michael Kennedy hold wake

WASHINGTON (AFP) — Family and friends of Michael Kennedy attended a wake Friday as they grieved the death of the son of Robert Kennedy in a skiing accident.

Kennedy, 39, was killed Wednesday when he slammed headfirst into a birch tree at the Colorado resort town of Aspen. Speaking to reporters in Massachusetts, Kennedy's brother, representative Joe Kennedy, thanked "the wonderful show of support that so many thousands of people have given to each of us" following the tragedy.

Members of the Kennedy clan were assembled for the wake at the Hyannis Port home of Michael Kennedy's mother, Ethel, where a steady stream of guests entered.

Kathleen Kennedy, one of Michael Kennedy's sisters and the lieutenant governor of the state of Maryland,

said: "It's been a very, very tough and difficult time. It's a time of terrible sadness — a sense of awful tragedy."

A funeral mass was scheduled for Saturday in the Cape Cod town of Centerville to be followed by burial at Holyhood Cemetery in the Boston suburb of Brookline, where Ambassador Joseph Kennedy, patriarch of the Roman Catholic family, and his wife Rose are buried.

Also buried there is Michael's younger brother David, who also died tragically, succumbing to an apparent drug overdose in Florida at the age of 28.

Autopsy results showed Michael Kennedy died from "massive head and neck trauma," according to a statement from the Pitkin County coroner's office, which ruled the death accidental.

Kennedy was playing a game of American football with other members of the

Indian Communists snub Congress over poll alliance

NEW DELHI (AFP) — Indian Communists, who could play a key role as powerbrokers in the country's upcoming elections, Saturday rejected appeals from the once-dominant Congress party to join forces against the Hindu nationalists.

The Communist Party of India (CPI) said they would battle it out against both the Congress and the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Indian People's Party, the country's largest two parties, in the February-March polls.

The snub came after a Congress leader Friday said the Communists would have to abandon their "anti-Congressism"

if they wanted to defeat the right wing BJP, accused by critics of sectarianism and of championing divisive religious policies.

CPI general secretary A.B. Bardhan, however, said: "There is nothing like blind anti-Congressism, which we are often accused of. It is with open eyes we are critical of the Congress policies and their corruption."

"We have always considered the BJP as a rank rightist, communal and reactionary force. We consider them dangerous. We will try to prevent them from taking power. But that does not mean we will spare the Congress."

The BJP, seen as pro-

Hindu and anti-Muslim by its critics, overtook the Congress as India's largest parliamentary party last year.

Both are hoping to come to power at the head of coalitions after the polls, which are expected to produce a hung parliament.

India's population of 960 million includes around 125 million Muslims.

India's outgoing United Front minority coalition government, made up of more than a dozen parties including the Communists, is expected to be third force in the polls.

The Front collapsed in November when the Congress, after backing it following 1996 elections to keep the BJP out of power,

withdrew its support.

The Congress appeal to the Communists, who are influential in three of India's 25 states, was part of its attempt to form an anti-BJP nationwide coalition.

The CPI and the more influential Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) claimed around 50 of the 545 seats in the last parliament.

They played a key role in launching the United Front centre-left coalition that took office in June 1996 after those elections produced a hung parliament.

Analysts say the Communists could again play a crucial role if the upcoming polls lead to another split verdict.

Blair vows to protect Falklands

LONDON (AFP) — British Prime Minister Tony Blair has promised Falklands islanders not to pursue any policies with Argentina which could compromise their future, The Times said Saturday.

"You have my absolute and firm promise that I will not pursue any relations or development with Argentina at the expense of the Falklands Islands. I am committed to protecting your right to choose your own way of life. I am also fully committed to insuring your security," Mr. Blair said in a New Year message to islanders, recorded by the BBC.

Mr. Blair recalled that during the 1982 war with Argentina, which had laid claim to the South Atlantic islands, Britain had demonstrated "unequivocally" its support for self-determination of the population of the islands.

"I would like to pay my personal tribute to your resolve. The new Labour government will be equally resolute," The Times quoted Mr. Blair's message as saying.

However the prime minister also said he wanted to develop an "open and constructive" relationship with Argentina whose head of state, President Carlos Menem is due to visit Britain in 1998.

The visit will be the first by an Argentine head of state to Britain since the Falklands conflict in which 652 Argentines and 255 British troops were killed.

"I believe that such contacts will benefit both the Falklands Islands and the United Kingdom. I hope they will improve your economic situation and your security," Mr. Blair told the islanders.

Hong Kong officials in a flap over bird flu fiasco

HONG KONG (AFP) — A top Hong Kong government official has offered to resign amid widespread criticism over the "botched" handling of the mass slaughter of 1.4 million chickens.

Critics levelled their guns at the government's handling of the cull of chickens in the territory, calling it "disorganised" and "unprofessional."

"The government has had seven months since the first incident of bird flu to plan a response and follow up and liaise with counterparts in China but they resorted to crisis management yet again," Jennifer Wan, health spokeswoman for the Citizens Party, said Saturday.

The English language South China Morning Post's lead editorial Saturday also criticised the government's handling of the chicken slaughter, which was carried out in an effort to eradicate deadly "bird flu."

"If properly handled, the exercise could at least have reassured a jittery public that everything possible was being done to check the spread of the virus," it said. "Now this benefit has been undercut by the botched way in which the operation was conducted."

Leslie Wei, Director of Agriculture and Fisheries Department, has offered to resign if it is revealed she mishandled the slaughter.

newspapers reported Saturday.

"I should take the blame because I was there," Mr. Wei said. "If my resignation is going to help solve the problem, then I will consider it." But two political parties said that resignations by government officials involved in the bungled operation would not help stop the spread of the virus.

"To resign is only the last resort. I don't think just resigning will do any good because if you resign it means you are giving up," Tang Siu-tong of the Hong Kong Progressive Alliance told radio station RTHK.

He added the Agriculture and Fisheries Department's job is made more difficult because of a shortage of manpower.

"They may not have enough capable staff to deal with the problem they are facing," Mr. Tang said.

Mr. Tang's comments were echoed by the Liberal Party.

Hong Kong has started testing rats amid fears they could spread the deadly bird flu, after officials revealed scavenging animals had opened sacks of slaughtered chickens.

They are considering expanding the testing to include dogs, cats and other birds such as ducks.

The sacks of dead chickens have been lying by roadsides waiting for dis-

posal. Television footage has also revealed that the effort to wipe out all live chickens in Hong Kong failed — several farms were overlooked and some gassed chickens managed to survive and pecked their ways out of the bags and are now roaming free.

Meanwhile, a missing three-year-old boy was found early Saturday and admitted to hospital as the 15th confirmed bird flu sufferer.

The three-year-old toddler, who went missing after returning a positive test for the bird flu at a New Territories health clinic, was listed in satisfactory condition. The parents told the doctors the boy started feeling ill six days before he went for the test.

The influenza A (H5N1) virus has killed four people while two others are in critical condition. There have been six suspected cases.

Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa admitted there were "inadequacies" in the slaughter operation.

"It is understandable that the public criticises the way we have handled the issue," newspapers reported Mr. Tung as saying.

Director of Health Margaret Chan said Saturday it would take up to two weeks to see if the mass slaughter of chickens and other poultry had been successful in ending the spread of the H5N1 virus.

21 Japanese choke to death on New Year's rice cakes

TOKYO (AFP) — A total of 21 Japanese choked to death on the first two days of the New Year in Tokyo after eating traditional glutinous "mochi" rice cakes in the belief the food brings longevity, a report said Saturday.

Of the 21 victims, 18 were aged 65 years or older, according to police and ambulance squad reports compiled by the mass-circulation daily Yomiuri Shimbum early Saturday.

Official nationwide figures were unavailable, although the Tokyo Fire Department said eight people died of suffocation after eating mochi or "ozoni" soup containing the traditional food.

Many Japanese families cook ozoni soup with vegetables and sticky rice cakes to celebrate New Year Day.

In order to prevent mochi deaths, which are repeated every year, the Tokyo Fire Department has called on people to "chew carefully before swallowing."

Last year, two elderly Japanese choked to death on the first two days of the New Year in Tokyo after eating mochi.

Pope visits central Italy quake victims

ANNIFO, Italy (AFP) — Pope John Paul II took comfort Saturday to victims of the earthquakes which have shaken central Italy since September, starting in Annifo where only seven houses were left standing.

He deplored the "wounds" inflicted on Italy's cultural heritage as well as the suffering inflicted on its citizens.

Twelve people died and nearly 38,000 lost their homes in the series of tremors and after-shocks since Sept. 26, when the main section of Assisi's Saint Francis Basilica was badly damaged.

A new tremor, the third in two days, hit the Foligno area Friday. It caused no damage, but was strongly felt by residents preparing for the Pope's visit, civil protection officials said.

Arriving by helicopter in the small mountain village of Annifo, the Pope expressed compassion for "those who saw their homes — representing the savings and sacrifices of a lifetime — collapse."

"I was struck by the scenes of destruction visible from the helicopter ... homes, churches, palaces full of history reduced to rubble in a matter of instants."

"I could see the deep scars the earthquake left on the land, and the wounds inflicted on its artistic heritage, from Assisi to

Spoleto," the Pope said. Shrugging off his frail health, the Pope stopped to talk quietly with some of the 5,000 faithful from Annifo and surrounding villages who had brought him produce from their farms or flowers from the fields.

The Pope went by car from Annifo to Cesi, where he paid tribute to those who remained despite the devastation of their hamlet, "demonstrating their attachment to the land."

From Cesi he was to travel to Assisi to visit the Franciscan monks and pray at the tomb of Saint Francis, in the lower basilica which was not seriously damaged.

The upper basilica and its 13th-14th century frescos suffered severe damage.

The 77-year-old Pontiff has insisted on travelling to personally meet victims despite the difficult physical conditions and a busy schedule ahead of his long trip to Cuba from Jan. 21 to 25.

He had wanted to visit the affected area soon after the first quakes but was discouraged by his advisers.

When the Pope toured the scene of a quake which killed hundreds in southern Italy in 1980 his visit two days after the disaster was criticised for requiring security arrangements which interfered with the relief operation.

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Road to change

THE ISRAELI Knesset's acrimonious debate of the 1998 budget reflects not only the deep divisions between the government's coalition partners on budgetary allocations but also the disturbing efforts of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to appease one bloc at the expense of another. The Israeli people are in agreement that never in their history has there been a leader who governed in such ways as Netanyahu's. Breaking promises that started on the peace process level has now become the hallmark on his rule on the domestic level as well. This deception cannot last much longer even though Netanyahu has thus far proved to be a shrewd survivor despite formidable challenges and crises that faced him since his assumption of power by a thin razor majority in 1996.

The prime minister's acrobatic style in dealing with the Arab World as well as his own people has puzzled all observers whether Israeli or foreign. Israelis of all shades of opinion have grown increasingly suspicious of their leader's ways of conducting affairs of high office, which are capable of distorting facts in order to stay in power. A number of ministers made good on their threats to resign from Netanyahu's cabinet, the last one being former Minister of Finance Dan Meridor. Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy has repeatedly threatened of leaving office, backing down every time at the last moment only to find himself obligated to do it again later. Levy's latest threat to quit obviously has grown out of desperation in dealing with Netanyahu. He just accused him point-blank of "deceiving him" on more than one count.

If Levy makes good on his ongoing rebellion, the stage could be set for early general elections. Even if the foreign minister withdrew his threat, however, the Israeli political scene would still be so riddled with damage that an early election becomes inevitable anyway. If Netanyahu cannot keep even his promises to his own partners in the government not to mention his own people, there is not much that we in the Arab World can expect from him.

His Majesty King Hussein has repeatedly sounded the alarm about the low credibility of the Israeli leader. The Palestinians have been saying the same thing all along. So has Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and many other world leaders, including U.S. President Bill Clinton.

It thus seems that the interests of the Arab and Israeli peoples now coincide in the sense that both sides have a vested interest to have Netanyahu leave office or at least dump his hawkish partners in the coalition. The sooner the Israeli people opt for new elections, the better it would be for all of us.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Rai's Samir Qatani Saturday scathingly attacked Mohammad Ra'fat and Hamadeh Faraneh, the two Jordanian members of Parliament who visited the Israeli parliament and met Israeli officials and parliament members, claiming that the visit has caused splits within the Jordanian society. Each of the two deputies has claimed in remarks on Jordan Television that they made the visit as a service to the Kingdom as they wanted to win Israeli parliamentarians to Jordan's side against Netanyahu and in a bid to influence Israeli deputies to exert pressure on their government to release the remaining Jordanian detainees in Israeli jails, according to the writer. He said the Jordanian deputies have the right to travel to Israel and meet whoever they want at the personal level, but they have no right to claim that they represent the Jordanian people or government. Both deputies have tried to justify their visit to Israel by different excuses, said the writer but in fact the visit has only caused embarrassment to the government, created splits within the Lower House of Parliament and harmed national unity.

Al Dustour's Yasser Zaateh commented on reports that the government intends to hike public hospital fees, warning that at least half of the population will be affected by such a decision. It is painful to see Jordanians facing economic recession and retreating standards of living while also confronting steeper costs in medical services, he said. The impending government measures follow a recent decision by private sector hospitals and the Jordan Medical Association (JMA) to increase their fees as well as the recent hikes in locally manufactured drugs by up to 50 per cent, noted the writer. He said the private sector hospitals do not even adhere to the rates set by the JMA, and so it becomes increasingly difficult for the limited-income groups to seek treatment in private hospitals and have only the public hospitals to turn to for treatment. But, he said, by hiking the public hospital fees, despite the low-level service they offer, God only knows how nearly 50 per cent of the Jordanian population can secure vital health services.

Sunday's Economic Pulse

Overloading Aqaba with a free zone

DUE TO objective reasons, Aqaba became a multipurpose city, and the government found itself obliged to locate several vital activities in this unique city. However, the degree of concentration of activities exceeded reason and threatened to suffocate the city and hurt most of the conflicting activities simultaneously taking place there.

Aqaba is a town growing at eight per cent a year, which reduced its original inhabitants into a status of minority. The high level of economic activity caused a high influx of guest labour from Jordan and Egypt.

Aqaba is a tourist attraction. More hotel rooms are being built to accommodate domestic and foreign tourists. Additional hotel rooms, tourist villages and golf courses are planned or under way.

It is an industrial city. Fertiliser plants are located there, and some 80 per cent of electricity consumed in Jordan is produced in Aqaba. In addition Aqaba is a seaport, airport, cargo centre, over and above an extensive network of roads, and railroads.

The government intends to invite investors to build a refinery in Aqaba for export purposes which is an invitation for oil tankers to visit the port. Aqaba will be a centre for receiving, processing, storing and distribution of gas whether Egyptian or Qatari. It will be the chosen place for electricity connection, communication cable, let alone the future Red Sea-Dead Sea Canal and its related facilities.

The government recently authorised the establishment

of the so-called American University of the Jordan in Aqaba to accommodate students from all Mideastern countries including Israel.

As if all these activities and facilities were not enough, the government decided, out of the blue, to transform the whole of Aqaba region into a free zone area, open to all nationalities and activities.

It is only natural that this sweeping trend to put all the eggs in the Aqaba basket, a spot where the borders of four countries meet, should be met with some serious reservations which could not be dismissed out of hand.

First, Aqaba is surrounded by high mountains which prevent any substantial expansion to absorb additional conflicting activities.

Second, the most basic rules of national security prevent concentrating all vital and strategic facilities in one spot, especially if this spot is defenceless and fully exposed and accessible by friends and enemies alike from land, sea, and air.

Third, we should admit that Jordan is not yet administratively ready to manage such a huge complex, especially a free zone area to be added to an already congested city.

Dubai, for instance, created a free zone in Jabal Ali which was a desert area with no inhabitants. It entrusted foreign companies to plan and implement the whole facility on a turnkey basis. It then brought managers, technicians, employees, accountants and labourers from abroad

to run Jabal Ali from A to Z.

Jordan, I hope, is not willing to do the same and have a zone fully imported. It seems that the government thinks that Aqaba can become a free zone area and be managed with the efforts of bureaucrats in a governmental department.

The World Bank, which was charged with the responsibility of evaluating the project, is over-eager to see it implemented, so that it can finance it and make money out of it. Perhaps the World Bank thinks that Aqaba, as a free zone, will bring Israel closer to the Arab World.

I am afraid we shall soon find ourselves involved in a high cost, white elephant project to create jobs in an area where there are no job seekers. The project will separate Aqaba from Jordan for custom, trade, income tax, and sales tax purposes. It will be excluded as a market for national products. It will bring another source for international trafficking. Value added in tourism will be reduced.

It is a large scale and serious project that was not studied carefully. In fact it was never debated in an intellectual conference, nor discussed in a television interview to compare pros and cons.

I hereby claim that free zones are out of fashion and that positive points of Aqaba free zone are almost nonexistent, while negative points are as clear and visible as the sun. It is not reasonable to make such major decisions with this carelessness.

Jordanian Perspective

Turning centrists into hard-liners

WE HAVE passed another year in our quest for peace, security and stability in the Middle East, but it was a total disappointment when compared with our hopes and dreams at the outset of the year or earlier when the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty was signed.

We all expected the Labour government in Israel to take the region closer towards peace only to see it being ousted partially due to Palestinian violence and in a reaction to the Ramadan massacre of Muslims during their dawn prayer in the Hebron Mosque.

That led spontaneously to the suicide bombings in February and March 1996 that contributed to the toppling of the Labour government and installing the hard-line regime of Benjamin Netanyahu. It is an understatement that all our aspirations were seriously obscured with the assumption of power by Netanyahu; if anything, it became crystal clear that a just, durable and comprehensive peace will remain elusive as long as Netanyahu remains in power.

We were resigned to accepting the status quo for some time at least until Israeli political forces themselves moved in and changed the scenario (that could happen, if the resignation of David Levy from the coalition government would have its desired effect), but the behaviour of extremist Israelis has raised grave concerns that more blood would be shed in the Holy Land against a backdrop of frozen politics.

First came the abhorrent act of total insult to Islam and to all of us as Muslims with the putting up of posters offensive to the Prophet Mohammed. That set off a series of violence that only contributed to veering many of those Israelis and Arabs who used to pride themselves as followers of a centrist path and kept an open mind towards peace with the Arabs towards a hard-line.

We could not have expected them to press for justice for Palestinians after the blaze of Muslim anger over the offensive posters. But little thought was given to the fact

that it was the very act of putting up those posters which triggered the anger.

Now we hear of plots to desecrate the holy Al Aqsa Mosque by throwing a pig's head into the Haram Al Sharif Complex in Jerusalem. Our natural anger aside, it should be noted that the scheme was reportedly hatched by the so-called "ultra nationalist" — meaning those who believe in the "promised land" and the rest of the Eretz Israel Hashleme ideology, that is the irredentism for the Greater Land of Israel.

We hope that the international community will get the inherent message: the culprits are also religious, for whom touching a pig's head is equally abhorrent as it is for Muslims but they were ready to do it if only to spark again another round of violence, which, had it been set on, would not have limited itself to the walls of Jerusalem.

Are those wealthy pro-Israelis in the U.S. and around the world aware that their religiously-motivated contributions help a big bunch of extremists whose ideologies have little resemblance to any religion?

Simultaneous with the reports of the desecration plot came the revelation that the chief rabbi of Israel had wanted to destroy Al Aqsa within a few moments after the Israeli army gained control of Arab East Jerusalem in the 1967 war. Keeping in mind the numerous attempts to destroy Al Aqsa, including arson and bombings since then, we cannot but remind the world that the Islamic holy places in Jerusalem will not remain sacred in Israeli hands, even in any post-final status arrangements.

But that is simply not enough. We cannot expect the world to shoulder the Muslim responsibility to defend Islamic holy sites, whether in Jerusalem or anywhere else.

We in Jordan have been, for decades, calling for collective Muslim action to defend the Islamic rights in Jerusalem. The Al Quds Committee of the Organisation

of Islamic Conference, which was created for that purpose, seems to have been turned into a paper tiger unwilling to or incapable of any strong action.

The fresh and strong focus that has been brought upon the issue of the Islamic holy places in Jerusalem should be a catalyst for all Muslims in the world to rethink their strategy. It is not enough to issue lofty statements and make promises. The Muslims need to act. That action could start with adopting practical measures to convince Israel that it would remain isolated as long as it refuses to come to terms with the Muslims demand for their rights in Jerusalem.

The political aspect of the status of Jerusalem should be separated from the religious aspect. We cannot simply expect the Palestinian National Authority, weakened as it is against the political pressure applied on it from all sides, to grapple with the issue all on its own. It not only needs Muslim support but also an Islamic leadership to steer a strong and determined campaign to pre-empt the Israelisation of Arab holy places in East Jerusalem.

We saw in the OIC summit held in Tehran last month the emergence of a sense of Islamic unity after a long period. If indeed that signals a new Islamic reawakening, then the first task that confronts the awakened Muslims is to set upon the task of protecting the Third Qibla of Islam. If the determination to do so remains lacking, then there is no sense in believing in the concept of a Muslim Umma and/or a global Islamic nation.

We have just heard a warning from the former head of Israeli military intelligence, Gen. Shlomo Gazet, saying that the Palestinian population was 1.5 million when the Intifada started in 1987 and has reached 2.5 million this year, and in 10 years from now it will be five million.

Gen. Gazet did not elaborate on this Palestinian demographic bomb but he warned that action should be taken now. Such a signal is chilling to many believers in peace, both Israelis and Arabs.

Israel still tries hard to forget unrecognised Arab villages

By Chris Doyle

THERE ARE roughly 70,000 Arabs living in 176 unrecognised villages in Israel. Israel refuses to provide the unrecognised villages with basic services including running water, sanitation, electricity, and access roads. The average number of people per household is 10.

Some progress in getting Israeli recognition for these villages occurred under the last government, but all such steps have been frozen by the Netanyahu regime. Mohammed Abu el-Hajja comes from the village of Ein Hod. As a child, he used to get up at 5.00am to go to primary school on foot, and arrive back at 8.00pm. He couldn't do any homework as his village has no electricity. In fact, it has no running water either, and so no sanitary facilities. Nearby, cows and goats in a neighbouring Israeli Jewish village have piped water and electricity. He may have an Israeli passport and Israeli citizenship, but his village figures on no official Israeli maps and to all intents and purposes does not legally exist (despite having done so for centuries prior to Israel's creation.)

These are some of the problems that are faced by around 70,000 Arabs living in the "unrecognised villages" inside Israel. How did these villages become "unrecognised"? Following the 1948 war, roughly 150,000 Palestinian Arabs remained inside the borders of the newly created State of Israel. They lived under military rule until 1966. Much of their land was confiscated and they were treated as second class citizens by the authorities in all fields. The Arab minority, today numbers over 900,000, 18% of Israel's population. Although Jews all over the world are allowed to come and live in Israel, this does not apply to those Palestinians who were expelled between 1947-48.

Under the Absentees Property Law of 1950, all Palestinian inhabitants not actually in their villages during the 1948 war for a certain period, were forbidden from returning. Their property, including land, was designated "absentee property." Some 80% of Israel's total area is land "abandoned" by the Arab refugees. However, the

term "absentee" was extended to those Arabs who had even remained inside Israel but during the fighting had temporarily moved their usual place of residence even when they returned to it. So if an Arab left his village and had sought refuge in a neighbouring village or town for safety, he was declared an "absentee" and his property was confiscated. Many of those living in unrecognised villages are such "present-absentees", but by no means all. Some lived in the same place continuously, but their presence was simply never recognised.

What are the effects of being "unrecognised"? Despite repeated requests from the Arab villagers, the Israeli authorities still refuse to provide any basic services to these communities. This is part of the pressure exerted on these communities to leave their lands.

Here are some of the basic services that these villages do not receive.

Running water: In order to overcome the lack of running water, the Arab inhabitants have to buy it from neighbouring villages and transport it back. The water is consequently very expensive and they do not get enough for normal daily use. There are severe health side effects especially the spread of disease. Sewage: None of these villages are connected to the sewage network, whilst many do not even have bathrooms. Attempts to add external bathrooms to a house violate the law. In December 1994, demolition orders were issued for houses in Kammaneh, for this reason. The inhabitants typically walk away from their homes and use open spaces as toilets.

Electricity: Not connected to the Israeli electricity network, the villagers where possible run their own generators but usually they have no electricity at all. Access roads: These villages are frequently to be found some distance from major roads but are denied permission to build access roads. Jewish villages in these areas are of course linked to the road network.

Communications: Most unrecognised villages are not served by the postal system nor do they have telephones.

Health: Health services are not available in nearly all the villages. This has obvious

consequences for the inhabitants, leading to the spread of disease. Typically children are the most vulnerable.

Education: Children often have to walk miles to schools. The few schools that do exist are inadequate with little equipment. As for all Arabs in Israel, the education system is discriminatory as study of Arab history, culture, and Islam are not part of the curriculum. Arab children grow up knowing more about the Torah and Jewish literature than they do about the Holy Qur'an and Palestinian writers and poets. Mohammed Abu el-Hajja comments that "he had to learn Arabic in Hebrew in Haifa."

Their status has definite economic consequences. Traditionally these villages were dependent on agriculture. However, without access to water and following the confiscation of their lands, this is no longer possible. Typically, these villagers are living in overcrowded conditions — 10 to a house — and work in the lowest paid sectors of the Israeli economy. DEMOLITIONS Most of the villagers have to live under the constant threat of demolition orders being issued for their houses. This is because all the area concerned was designated "agricultural" land where construction is not permitted and consequently, these houses, most of which preceded the 1965 "Planning and Construction Law", are illegal. This law did not include hundreds of Arab villages in the plans laid out for the country. The authorities could even carry out projects on these lands as the villages were unrecognised.

"Illegal" property has to be demolished and the owners evicted. This continues to happen today. For example, in 1988, at Khawaleh seven houses were demolished, their occupants left without shelter. Several demolition orders have recently been issued against houses in Ein Hod. In fact when a demolition order is issued, the owner is charged with carrying out the order himself, or else he is arrested. If he refuses to demolish his house, the authorities do this for him and then charge him for their costs. The discrimination against the Arabs is clear.

In the Galilee many Jewish settlements have been established on land previously

designated as "agricultural", and re-termed "residential" when convenient.

The fight for justice

The Arab villagers formed the Association of Forty in 1988 in an attempt to demand their rights and recognition of the villages. Fighting through the Israeli courts and legal system, they have achieved some success. Eight villages were recognised in the north of Israel, but so far the improvements have been negligible. This happened under the last Israeli government, headed by Yitzhak Rabin and then, Shimon Peres. However, these limited moves forward have ground to a halt as the Likud government has frozen all further steps towards recognising more villages.

This is typical of its recent policies which do not attempt to bridge the gap of discrimination between the Arab and Jewish communities. Some Ministers have even called for recognition of these 8 villages to be cancelled. The Israeli government must be pressured to recognise these villages and adopt proper master plans for their development. It must also desist from demolition and eviction as a policy as well as the confiscation of lands belonging to the inhabitants of these unrecognised villages. All basic services must be provided to the same levels as the Jewish sector in Israel. The International Court of Justice in the Hague ruled that all the "unrecognised villages" should be connected to the water system and that the villages should be included in planning programmes along with their residents. The plight of these Arabs (who are Israeli citizens) inside Israel, makes a mockery of Israeli claims to be a democratic state.

The UK government has promised to look into this issue, and it is hoped that representations about this human rights issue be made at the highest level.

This article is taken from a recent briefing on the unrecognised Arab villages in Israel of the Council for Arab and British Understanding.

Israeli economic growth declines with unemployment rising to 8%

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Economic growth in Israel fell by more than half in 1997 while unemployment rose steadily to top eight per cent of the working population, according to government figures.

The Central Bureau of Statistics, in its year-end report, said preliminary figures showed that gross national product (GDP) grew only 2.1 per cent last year, down from 4.5 per cent in 1996 and 7.1 per cent in 1995.

Hardest hit was the building sector, with activity falling five per cent compared to growth of six per cent in 1996 and 16.2 per cent in 1995.

But the slowdown was felt across the economy, with produc-

tivity falling one per cent and the rate of increase in business sector production dropping to two per cent from five per cent in 1996 and 6.9 per cent between 1990 and 1995.

Industrial product rose two to three per cent in 1997 after posting gains of five to 11 per cent during the previous six years.

Meanwhile, government figures for unemployment showed that the jobless rate rose above eight per cent for the first time since 1994, when the economy was still trying to absorb the massive influx of immigrants from the former Soviet Union.

The economic slowdown has accompanied a virtual breakdown in

the Middle East peace process under the right-wing government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The downturn has hampered plans by Mr. Netanyahu to liberalise Israel's economy by selling off its vast state industrial sector and cutting the government's budget deficit.

Due to strong opposition to proposed spending cuts, Mr. Netanyahu's 1998 budget failed to pass through parliament by a Wednesday midnight deadline, although debate was continuing Thursday and government officials insisted the bill would gain approval before the weekend.

To obtain support from members of his unruly eight-party

coalition. Mr. Netanyahu had to add tens of millions of dollars in spending to his budget and critics suggested the result could be higher taxes this year which could further dampen the economy.

In its report, the statistics bureau also said Israel's population rose to 5.9 million in 1997, compared to 5.76 million in 1996, and would likely top six million in 1998 — the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Jewish state.

Of the total, 80 per cent of the population is Jewish and the other 20 per cent Arabs and a small number of other minorities.

S. Arabia to develop industrial cities

ABU DHABI (AFP) — Saudi Arabia plans to spend up to \$2.4 billion to develop its two main industrial cities to boost exports of petrochemicals and other products, officials have said.

The plan to develop Jubail in the Gulf and the Red Sea port of Yanbu covers electricity, sewage, water desalination, refrigeration and other fields.

A company will be created to oversee the venture, which will include an investment of between six billion and nine billion Saudi riyals (\$16 billion to \$24 billion) until 2003, project manager Okaili Khawaji said.

"The project coincides with plans to set up new industries and expand existing units with a total investment of 70 billion riyals (\$18.6 billion)," he told the United Arab Emi-

rates (UAE) business weekly Emirates Today.

He said development of the two cities would boost Saudi Arabia's exports by nearly 50 per cent and allow it to diversify its oil-reliant economy.

Jubail and Yanbu are the main base of the Gulf Kingdom's petrochemical industries, accounting for nearly five per cent of global chemical output. Production of petrochemicals and petroleum products by the Saudi Basic Industries Corporation is set to increase to 28 million tonnes in a few years from 25 million tonnes a year currently.

Saudi Arabia is the world's biggest oil producer and exporter and its crude reserves of around 261 billion barrels exceed a quarter of the global recoverable oil resources.

Sun is set to rise on economy in Russia, E. Europe — OECD

PARIS (AFP) — The sun is set to begin rising over the economies of Russia and countries in eastern Europe which are not members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the organisation forecast recently.

In Russia, a long period of economic decline had ended last year when the economy showed growth of 0.5 per cent. In 1998, it would grow by 3.0 per cent and by 5.0 per cent the following year.

Inflation continued to fall, to nearly 12.0 per cent last year from 131.0 per cent in 1995, and would steady at about 10.0 per cent in 1998 and 1999.

Interest rates should continue to ease following a spectacular decline in the autumn of last year and should fall to a 12-monthly rate of less than 20.0 per cent, having exceeded 100.0 per cent in 1996.

Russia continues to face a difficult budget situation owing mainly to severe problems of tax collection. A deficit by public administrations, amounting to 7.0 per cent in 1997, was likely

to amount to 5.0 per cent in 1998 and in 1999.

A recovery of investment was hampered by many obstacles and notably by inadequacy of capital markets. The number of finance houses in Russia had declined by nearly 2,300 at the beginning of 1996 to about 1,800 in August 1997.

Since 1996, official policy had been to allow the currency to depreciate within a given range of fluctuation.

The OECD reported that gross domestic product (GDP) in Russia was beginning to expand and said that imports and exports should grow in volume. A surplus on the balance of payments current account would decline regularly from 11.0 per cent in 1997 to 9.0 per cent in 1998 and 7.0 per cent in 1999, it said.

But the organisation saw no prospect that unemployment would improve. The rate of unemployment of 9.5 per cent in 1997 would rise to 10.0 per cent in the following two years.

Unemployment was worsening in most countries in central and east-

ern Europe.

The economy of Ukraine was steady but GDP continued to fall, by 10.0 per cent in 1996 and 4.0 per cent in 1997. The rate of structural reform, and notably privatisation, lacked drive and this had caused the International Monetary Fund to delay a loan.

Bulgaria and Romania, which had faced very difficult economic conditions at the beginning of last year, were experiencing the positive effects of stabilisation programmes.

The Romanian economy would grow by 2.0 per cent in 1998 and 6.0 per cent in 1999 and that of Bulgaria by 1.0 per cent and 3.0 per cent, following negative rates in 1996.

The economies of Slovakia, of Slovenia and of the three Baltic countries continued to develop but increases of the deficits on the current account reflected persistent problems of competitiveness.

Slovakian GDP would grow by 4.5 per cent in 1998 and by 4.0 per cent in 1999 and the Slovenian economy would grow by 4.0 per cent in each year.

IMF: Japan problems could worsen

WASHINGTON (R) — The International Monetary Fund (IMF) said it had made a downward revision to its forecasts for Japan's economic growth in 1998 and said the world's second largest economy faced risks "on the downside."

In its revised World economic outlook report, the lending agency said the Japanese economy would grow by only 1.1 per cent in 1998 compared with only 1.0 per cent in 1997. As recently as October, it forecast 1998 growth at 2.1 per cent and 1997 growth at 1.1 per cent.

At a news conference on the report, IMF chief economist Michael Mussa said there was a risk the growth forecasts could be revised downward again if problems with business confidence and difficulties in the financial sector persisted.

"The risks are on the downside but there's a bit of potential on the upside as well," he said, citing Japan's highly competitive export sector that could counterbalance problems in other areas of the economy.

The report said Japan's economic recovery had "essentially stalled" this year and it was "now expected to experience markedly slower growth in both 1997 and 1998 than in 1996 — another interruption, in effect, of the hesitant recovery begun in 1995."

Japan's problems could easily threaten the economies of the world's industrial economies.

"The key near-term risk for the advanced economies involves a possible intensification of the slowdown in Japan, which could aggravate already serious problems in the financial sector, with potential spillovers to other countries," the report said.

A major reason for the faltering economic recovery was the government's decision to raise a consumption tax in April, resulting in a fiscal contraction described by the report as "clearly too abrupt in view of the fragile recovery."

Japan in recent days announced a third package of economic stimulus efforts, including a one-time tax cut of 2 trillion yen (\$15.6 billion). It includes the issuing of 10 trillion yen (\$77.8 billion) worth of bonds to help stabilise the nation's frail banking system as well as steps to help small and medium-size businesses.

Mr. Mussa described the stimulus package as "a step in the right direction, an important step."

But he cautioned that there was no way of knowing whether the package to strengthen banking sector would provide enough money and it was also not clear how the funds would be used.

Israeli minister warns of explosion over unemployment

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israeli Labour Minister Eiluh Ishai has warned of the risk of a "social explosion" after news the country's jobless rate has hit a three-year high.

"If an emergency plan is not put into action, a social explosion will be unavoidable," he told reporters after the announcement that unemployment rate hit eight per cent last month.

The number of unemployed Israeli workers increased by 1.2 per cent by the end of November to 151,600.

Sixteen Israeli cities have unemployment rates above 10 per cent.

Meanwhile, the cost of living dropped 0.3 per cent in November, its second successive monthly decline, the National Institute of Statistics said.

Inflation slowed because of a seasonal decline in the price of fruit and vegetables and a decrease in the price of housing.

Prices have gone up 7.3 per cent since the beginning of the year and the 1997 inflation rate is expected to reach eight per cent.

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR SUNDAY, JANUARY 4, 1998

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Overseas contacts and foreign friends can get information that's not available to you through normal means. Make sure you keep those channels open. Meanwhile, catch up on reading. Something you learn from a book will help you figure out how to get more money from the work you do.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) You're worried a little about money during the holiday season. There's more coming in, but not much. Not to worry. By scrimping here and saving there, you'll be able to spend more on presents. This is all going to work out.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) Conditions are better than they were just a couple days ago. You're going to have a better chance of winning an argument. That's important to you, because arguments are your life. Gemini's keep pretty close track of the wins and losses. You're lucky tonight in both arguments and love. Does that give you any ideas?

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) It could be easier to get money today, especially for education. If you're thinking about going back to school, do the research. Make a few calls. Also, check out the classes you could take. You want to do the ones that will bring you the best return for your investment, of course.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) This is a great day for a party. There are probably lots of them to choose from. You've got more options than you know what to do with. You'll be busy from your breakfast date this morning to your dinner date tonight. There could be a foul-up later in the day. Not to worry. Everything should get straightened out in the end.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) You and your sweetheart have gone past the dreaming stage. Now you're into the actual work of the project. This is going to be very good for your relationship. It's always best to have a project the two of you are working on together. It keeps your mind off the trivial disagreements you run into otherwise.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) If you're in sales, you're in luck. Make all the follow-up and cold calls you can. You'll be so charming, people will want to buy things you're not even selling. You'll have to take on a whole new line just to keep up with the demand. That's doable.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) The money's a little tight today, but that's OK. Something does need to be purchased for the home, however. Make that a top priority item for now. You can still shop around for a bargain, but you're going to want something that will last. If you have to pay a little more to do that, it's probably a good investment.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Most of the difficult stuff has been done by now. And your attitude has improved! You'll find it more noticeable in other people. It seems like they're all friendlier. Even if they say something critical, you don't mind. You've broken through to a whole new level. You're more confident, and it shows. So finish up whatever needs to be done, then celebrate.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) It seems like everything is coming down at the last moment. Don't stress. Get in there and do the best you can. Actually, conditions are pretty good for this sort of activity. You'll probably get more churned out in the next five hours than you did in the previous 10.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) This is a great day for romance. Start with a conversation on an interesting subject. If you don't have a solid intellectual bond, it's unlikely you'll want to develop any other kind. It looks like you'll have lots of interesting people to talk to, and interesting relationships to develop. Keep the best of the litter.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) You're a very active person, but this is ridiculous. It seems like you're supposed to be eight different places at once. Delegate everything you can. There's still lots to be done, however. Your whole world is in an uproar. Just keep at it until you get it right.

Birthstone of January: Garnet — Rose Quartz

THE Daily Crossword Edited by Wayne Robert Williams

1 Cook sugar for apples
11 Watch pockets
15 Wind-speed measurement device
16 Roundish shape
17 Los Angeles suburb
18 Turkish monetary unit
19 Language suffix
20 San Antonio shrine
21 Red-light situation
22 Dined
23 Moral misjudgments
24 OB turned golfer
25 Requirement for UFO
26 Boxer
27 Choice of cabinet material
28 Chem. chart fig.
29 Author of "Studies in the Psychology of Sex"
31 ER or OR worker
32 Sierra
33 Hammerhead
34 Oriental sluffs
35 Blini piece
36 Old pro
37 Bookkeeper's milieu
38 Rabbit's title
39 Altar sentence
40 Spassily or Pasternak
41 Coeur d'Alene, ID
42 H.S. subj.
43 First governor of Alaska
44 Of a student official
45 Will, group
46 Unfettered
47 Dates
48 Fettered

5 Perplexing situation
6 Actor Estevez
7 Eastern shores of the Mediterranean
8 Particulars
9 Love of tennis
10 Segment of history
11 Pursues to a solution
12 City north of Leon
13 Spanish neighborhood
14 Scheduled
15 "Catch 22" star
16 Hairless
17 Corrida call
18 Creates art on canvas
19 Before, in poetry
20 Chicago tower
21 Stylish, ironically
22 Nav. rank
23 Change
24 Art

37 Caught in a trap
40 Cavalry swords
41 Moon's most distant location
42 Pool in the Sahara, perhaps
43 "The Threepenny Opera" dramatist
44 Apartment tenant
45 Space between leaf veins
46 Ink stains
47 "Rule Britannia" composer
48 For in Spanish
49 King of France

Peanuts

YOU KNOW WHY I WANT TO BUY PEGGY JEAN THOSE GLOVES FOR CHRISTMAS?

WHEN I FIRST MET HER THIS SUMMER AT CAMP I NOTICED WHAT PRETTY HANDS SHE HAD... I WANT THOSE PRETTY HANDS TO BE WARM.

BUT I DON'T HAVE TWENTY-FIVE DOLLARS TO BUY THE GLOVES...

SEND HER A NICE CARD AND TELL HER TO KEEP HER HANDS IN HER POCKETS!

Andy Capp

YOU'VE BEEN SHOUTING IN YOUR SLEEP, PET!

HAD ANOTHER ONE OF THEM DREAMS—YOUR ALMA WAS IN IT AGAIN!

OH, DEAR, POOR YOU!

NOT AT ALL, PET!

I'D RATHER SEE HER IN MY DREAMS THAN AT THE FRONT DOOR!

Mutt'n'Jeff

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

I'M SHOVELING THE SNOW OFF YOUR NEW CAR!

YOU FOOL, DON'T YOU KNOW THAT WILL SCRATCH IT?

OH, THAT'S OK. IT'S AN OLD SHOVEL ANYWAY!

THE BETTER HALF. By Glasbergen

"My teeth are sensitive to cold food, so my dentist gave me these tiny mittens."

JUMBLE. THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME

Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

TURTE
GOSUB
WHERDS
TONPHY

Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Answer: "BUTT"

(Answers tomorrow)

Saturday's Jumbles: FAUNA BANDY BARREL HECKLE
Answer: Belt tightening calls for this — A BUCKLE

Daily Business Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Anani: Jordan is passing through a period of fundamental change

JORDAN IS passing through a period of fundamental change that has caused an economic slowdown, Deputy Prime Minister for Development Affairs Jawad Anani said in recent lecture. He explained that the Kingdom is entering a transitional stage as it is moving from an independent and separate market system to a trading bloc mechanism that is based on sharp competition. "The change has even included the political sides and influenced the relationship that ties the country to the surrounding climate," Dr. Anani said.

He indicated that the most important changes that affected the Jordanian economy were the signing of the European-Jordanian partnership accord and anticipated membership in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) which makes it mandatory to free commercial dealings around the globe. Dr. Anani saw the changes including both "opportunities" and "challenges."

"We have entered a world of conflicting national interest. Politics has shifted from the stage of national objective to exerting influence through pressure and, consequently, we have to adapt our interests with the varied interests in the world," the deputy premier told the audience at Al

Faiha Club. "The world has become a single trading unit and will open up not in the commercial sector alone but in all services and other fields."

Dr. Anani spoke about the "dictatorship of the new world economy" and noted that it can either be accepted or rejected. However, "no one has the choice not to accept the consequences of not joining the new world system. He said: "We in Jordan have a choice not to enter this new world or to accept the change and challenge and transform it into an opportunity."

He added that this imposes on us many issues which makes it necessary for us to agree on the means to solve them. The lecturer stressed the need to look for tools to the "economic democracy" just exactly as we look for tools to the "political democracy" noting that we have entered a world where it is not enough just to talk about distributing the benefits but also where talk should be about distributing the obligations.

"International aid is no longer free and this should encourage us to change," Dr. Anani emphasised (Al Dustour + Al Rai).

Jordanian traders, industrialists to visit Saudi Arabia next month

AMMAN (J.T.) — A Jordanian delegation representing the Federation of Jordanian Chambers of Commerce (FJCC) and the Amman Chamber of Industry will next month pay a visit to Saudi Arabia at the invitation of the Saudi Council of Chambers of Commerce and Industry, according to a statement Saturday by FJCC Chairman Haidar Murad.

Expressing hope that the visit will further promote Jordanian-Saudi Arabian economic and trade links, Mr. Murad said the delegation plans to hold talks with Saudi officials concerned with economic and trade issues.

He said the talks, which will cover the prospect of launching joint ventures, are considered as a follow-up to negotiations held recently in Amman between a visiting Saudi economic delegation and

Jordanian officials and business people.

Mr. Murad and the chairman of the Amman Chamber of Industry, Khalid Abu Hassan, will lead the delegation which is scheduled to tour four Saudi cities: Riyadh, Dammam, Jeddah and Medina to discuss joint ventures and trade relations.

Two large Saudi Arabian delegations visited Jordan in 1996 and 1997 and met His Majesty King Hussein and His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan as well as senior government officials and Jordanian businessmen.

According to Mr. Murad, the two visits helped boost bilateral trade exchanges. In 1996, trade exchanges amounted to JD 221 million of which Jordan's exports accounted for JD 129.6 million and imports from Saudi Arabia were worth

JD 91.5 million.

In the first nine months of 1997, Jordan exported JD 108 million worth of national products and imported JD 76.2 million worth of Saudi goods, according to Mr. Murad.

Also Saturday, the Jordan Vegetable and Fruits Exports Association said that Saudi Arabia has lifted a ban on agricultural imports from Jordan.

Association Secretary General Nabil Attieh was quoted by Al Rai daily as saying that Saudi Arabia had over the past five years banned agricultural imports from Jordan for technical reasons to provide protection to its own products.

As of the beginning of 1998, Mr. Attieh noted, Saudi Arabia has lifted the ban and Jordanian exporters are now ready to export fruits and vegetables to Saudi markets.

U.S. sets up \$60m fund for Jordan, Palestinians

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — The United States has announced the establishment of a \$60 million equity fund to encourage U.S. investment in the Palestinian territories and Jordan.

The fund of the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, a U.S. federal agency, will invest in a variety of projects, including both service and manufacturing companies, the U.S. consulate general in

occupied Jerusalem said.

"A specific fund objective is to support Palestinian-Israeli joint ventures," the consulate general said in a statement, adding that the fund expects to make 60 per cent of its investments in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the rest in Jordan.

The new fund was formally approved at the Middle East and North Africa summit held in Qatar in November, it said.

Jordan phosphate sales rise

AMMAN (J.T.) — The Jordan Phosphate Mines Company (JPMC) Saturday announced that its production in 1997 has increased by 12 per cent over 1996 and that its sales were up by 8.4 per cent over the same period.

According to JPMC sources, the company has launched two joint ventures with Japan and India last year. An agreement of partner-

ship between the JPMC and Norsk Hydro of Norway was signed last August to establish one of the largest phosphate projects in the Kingdom, with a \$600 million capital.

According to the agreement, the Norwegian company will be able to produce 440,000 tonnes of phosphoric acid and 1.2 million tonnes of fertilisers annually.

Asian stock markets brace for more turmoil

HONG KONG (AFP) — Asian stock markets limp into the New Year battered and bruised by the regional economic crisis and knowing that the bloodbath of 1997 is not over yet.

Investors were only too glad to see off the year in which tens of billions of dollars were wiped off share values as capital took flight from the region flattened by a financial tempest. But analysts warned the turmoil, which was set off by the July 2 devaluation of the Thai baht and peaked in October and November when panic selling reverberated across the globe, had not yet run its full course.

More bad news is in the works as regional economies slow, governments tighten their belts, corporate earnings take a hit and foreign fund managers reduce their Asian allocations. "As long as the currency turmoil doesn't settle down, the whole stock market prospects in the region will be still uncertain," said Ang Sui Oon, economist with J.M. Sassoon in Singapore.

"For the whole of 1998, we are looking at very bad corporate earnings which possibly can begin recovering only in 1999," she said.

Year-end window dressing did nothing to dispel the gloom of 1997, which deflated the mighty Asian "tiger" economies, with Thailand, Indonesia and South Korea all under International Monetary Fund (IMF) intensive care.

"There has never been a year like this year. I feel as if I had a bad dream," said a dealer in Seoul who summed up the regional mood.

South Korea, the latest patient to join the IMF sickbay, saw its key stock market index fall 42.2 per cent over the year to 376.31. It marked a 52.5 per cent decline from the year's high of 792.29 on June 17.

In Tokyo, the key Nikkei index of selected 225 issues on the Tokyo Stock Exchange lost 4,102.61 points during the year for a 21.2 per cent loss.

The Nikkei's finish at 15,258.74, after months of worries over bankruptcies, was the lowest year-end level since 1985.

An estimated 73 billion yen (\$560 million) evaporated on

the Tokyo Stock Exchange's major board, as total market value of all first-section issues fell to 273,908 billion yen.

"The market is expected to continue suffering from its own uncertain prospects and those of the economy," said Okasan Securities chief strategist Tetuya Ishijima. "You can never underestimate Asian currency conditions," he said.

In Hong Kong, the Hang Seng index ended the year 19 per cent down, closing at 10,722.76. This marked a 35 per cent decline from the all-time high of 16,673.27 on Aug. 7, a month after the former British colony reverted to China.

"Trading will continue to remain cautious," said Sean Li, sales director at Amsteel Securities in Hong Kong, of the outlook for 1998.

"The market will largely hinge upon the scope and depth of the currency upheaval in the region," he said. "We have to resolve the problems first, before seeing the dawn."

Malaysia's key stock barometer ended the year at a five-year low of 594.44. It repre-

sented a loss of 636.09 points or 51.7 per cent from the 1,230.53 level over the year.

More than 400 billion ringgit (\$105 billion) were wiped off Malaysian stocks alone.

"1998 will likely be a consolidation phase, with any upside in the bourse to come only after the dust has settled and the country has restructured for a new phase of growth," Patrick Zecha, research chief at South Johore Securities, said.

Singapore's Straits Times Industrials index shed 31.2 per cent to 1,529.84 over the year and dealers and analysts forecast a further 10-to-20 per cent loss in the next six months as the island's economy slows.

As economic growth slows to about four per cent in 1998 from 7.6 per cent in 1997 and amid high interest rates, analysts expect corporate earnings growth to fall to single digits next year.

The Philippine Stock Exchange composite index fell 46 per cent from the year's high of 3,447.60 points to close at 1,869.23. One estimate put the loss in market capitalisation at 1.088 trillion pesos (\$27.2 billion).

For 1998 we will "probably see the market going down," said Julie Villena of Magnum International Securities Inc. in Manila, adding that it would most likely be the trend for all of Asia.

"Asia is not exactly the place to be right now," she said.

In Bangkok, the catalyst of the regional financial woes, the Stock Exchange of Thailand broad-based index plunged 54 per cent over the year to 372.69.

"This year has been an abyssal one for the Thai stock market, and 1998 doesn't look much rosier," Bill Anderson, an analyst at Seamco Securities said.

"The present situation is so dire that any indication of a market turnaround will fuel anticipation. But at the moment there is little sign of recovery on the way," he said.

The Jakarta Stock Exchange Composite Index fell 37 per cent over the year to close at 401.712. From the year's high of 740.83 set July 8, it marked a four-per cent dip.

Kevin Evans, a senior analyst with Punin Securities in Jakarta, compared the Asian crisis to the great depression of 1929 in the United States.

"East Asia will record 1997 much as the world recorded 1929. It was a year in which the assumptions of ever-onward prosperity were torn asunder," Mr. Evans said.

Elsewhere, a flood of listings and the pullout of Japanese and Korean investors saw Shanghai share prices reverse first-half gains in the latter half of 1997, while domestic political uncertainty clouded the Bombay bourse.

The star regional performer of the year was Taipei. The Taiwan Stock Exchange weighted price index gained 20 per cent over the year to 8,187.27, off an Aug. 26 high of 10,116.84.

But even it was not entirely immune to the Asian crisis, and analysts feared that further turbulence in the region could cast a shadow on the market.

"There is no sign the regional financial crisis will end any time soon," said Ben Lee of Nomura Securities Investment Advisory Co. Ltd.

REUTERS The Business of Information

Major Currencies & Cross Rates									
Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY	CAD	ITL	NLG	FRF
US Dollar	1.0000	1.8025	0.6907	1.4689	152.26	1.4241	1772.10	2.0318	6.5435
DE Mark	0.5548	1.0000	0.3379	0.8137	73.39	0.7897	982.64	1.1271	3.3474
GB Sterling	1.6402	2.9588	1.0000	2.4048	216.88	2.3358	2906.85	3.3317	9.8564
CH Franc	0.6817	1.2279	0.4161	1.0000	90.15	0.9702	1207.56	138.41	4.1093
JP Yen	0.0076	0.1367	0.0083	0.0108	1.0000	0.0075	100.00	163.50	4.5595
CA Dollar	0.7022	1.2576	0.4243	1.0213	1.08	1.0000	1236.75	1.4168	4.2119
IT Lira	0.0006	0.0108	0.0038	0.0097	1341.20	0.0033	1.0000	11.46	3.4025
NL Guilder	0.4922	0.8849	0.2999	0.7221	65.05	0.7008	871.70	1.0000	2.9685
FR Franc	0.1657	0.2988	0.1010	0.2402	21.90	0.2359	33.66	33.6600	1.0000

Middle Eastern Currencies									
Currency	USD	JOD	SAR	BAH	QAT	KUW	AED	LBP	EGP
US Dollar	1.0000	0.7085	3.7505	0.0000	0.0000	0.3049	3.6724	1622.00	3.3890
Jordan Dinar	1.4114	1.0000	5.2936	0.0000	0.0000	0.4303	5.1833	2148.20	4.7833
Saudi Riyal	0.2666	0.1889	1.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0813	0.98	406.81	0.9036
Bahrain Dinar	0.3760	0.2666	0.2666	1.0000	0.0000	0.0813	0.98	406.81	0.9036
Qatar Dinar	0.3760	0.2666	0.2666	0.2666	1.0000	0.0813	0.98	406.81	0.9036
Kuwait Dinar	0.2666	0.1889	0.1889	0.1889	0.1889	1.0000	12.05	4982.62	10.9101
Emirates Dinar	0.2723	0.1929	0.1929	0.1929	0.1929	0.0830	1.00	414.44	0.9228
Lebanese L1000	0.65	0.4655	0.4655	0.4655	0.4655	0.2003	2.4128	1.00	2.2267
Egyptian	0.2551	0.2091	1.1067	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	1.0838	449.10	1.0000


Energy					Mid-East Currencies				
Oil	Last	Previous	Oil	Last	Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF
Brent	16.03	16.04	SA Riyal	0.2666	0.2666	0.4808	0.1628	0.39139	35.2908
W. Texas	17.47	17.62	AE Dirham	0.2723	0.2723	0.49101	0.16602	0.39971	36.0412
Bonny	16.03	16.04	KW Dinar	0.2666	0.2666	0.51366	2	4.81464	434.216
Dubai	14.95	14.90	BH Dinar	0.0000	0.0000	0.47408	1.6	3.85802	344.59
UL Gas	170.00	169.00	CY Pound	1.887	1.887	1.1501	2.7688	249.841	1.0000

Metal Prices			Currency Deposit Rates (Bid)									
Metal	Bid	Offer	Period	1 -	3 -	6 -	9 -	1 -	3 -	6 -	9 -	Year
Gold (oz's)	288	288.5	Month	5.56	5.58	5.72	5.84	5.88	5.88	5.88	5.88	5.88
Silver (oz's)	5.96	5.98	Month	7.40	7.40	7.56	7.56	7.56	7.56	7.56	7.56	7.56
Platinum (oz's)	367.5	369.5	Month	0.37	0.31	0.31	0.31	0.37	0.37	0.37	0.37	0.37
AL (3 Months)	1561	1556	Month	3.43	3.56	3.70	3.75	3.81	3.81	3.81	3.81	3.81
CU (3 Months)	1730	1735	Month	3.44	3.56	3.68	3.78	3.87	3.87	3.87	3.87	3.87
Zinc (3 Months)	1106	1110	Month	1.11	1.34	1.51	1.53	1.59	1.59	1.59	1.59	1.59
Lead (3 Months)	662	666	Month	5.91	5.79	5.67	5.25	5.10	5.10	5.10	5.10	5.10
NI (3 Months)	6070	6100	Month									

Main Equity Indices									
Bourse	Index	Value	Chng	% Chng	High	Low	Pr Cls	High	Low
New York	DOW JONES	7921.45	13.2	0.17	7952.94	7880.85	7908.26	7952.94	7880.85
New York	S&P 500	969.38	-1.05	-0.11	974.02	965.97	970.43	974.02	965.97
London	FT-SE 100	5193.5	68	1.33	5203.38	5138	5135.5	5203.38	5138
Tokyo	NIKKEI 225	15258.74	483.52	3.27	15258.74	14838.5	14775.2	15258.74	14838.5
Paris	CAC 40	3040.14	41.23	1.37	3048	3005.84	2998.91	3048	3005.84
Frankfurt	DAX	4315.37	65.68	1.55	4316.23	4276.52	4249.69	4316.23	4276.52

Energy			JOD Cross Rates		
Commodity	Last	Delivery	Currency	Buy	Sell
Coffee (c/lbs)	168.08	Spot	US Dollar	0.708	0.710
Cocoa (\$/ton)	1658	Spot	GB Sterling	1.1728	1.1788
Sugar (\$/ton)	302.8	Spot	DE Mark	0.3953	0.3973
Wheat (\$/ton)	106	Spot	CH Franc	0.4864	0.4888
Soya (c/lbs)	24.79	Spot	FR Franc	0.1182	0.1188
Tea (c/lbs)	165	Spot	JP Yen	0.5445	0.5472
Barley (\$/bsh)	0	Spot	NL Guilder	0.3508	0.3526
Rice (\$/ton)	570	Spot	IT Lira	0.4022	0.4042

* Source: Central Bank of Jordan.

AMMAN FINANCIAL MARKET											
HOUSING BANK CENTER - JORDAN - SHEIKH SA											
TELEPHONE: 607131 / 607119											
ORGANIZED MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR SATURDAY 03/01/1998											
PAST 12 MONTHS HIGH	PAST 12 MONTHS LOW	COMPANY'S NAME	P / E	DIV.	NO. OF TRANS.	NO. OF SHARES	VALUE TRADED JD	OPEN PRICE	CLOSE PRICE	CHANGE	
346,000	249,000	ARAB BANK	14.8	1.24	1	20	6440	325.00	322.00	3.00	
M 2,340	1,680	JOR. NATIONAL BK.	8	0.00	21	14012	24645	1.78	1.76	0.02	
S 3,540	1,670	BANK OF JORDAN	5.3	0.00	4	500	958	3.76	3.68	0.08	
5,300	4,110	THE HOUSING BK.	3.73	0.00	1	500	28400	5.20	5.20	0.00	
S 4,180	1,850	JOR. MUHATTI BANK	10.8	0.00	4	1428	2390	2.14	2.03	0.11	
980	620	JOR. GULF BANK	3.9	10.77	4	12980	8335	6.64	6.65	0.01	
*S 4,050	2,280	JOR. ISLANDIC BANK	11.4	4.27	8	1950	4405	2.35	2.25	0.10	
BANK SECTOR TOTALS			INDEX: 230.00	%CHG: -1.01		45	36310	76273			
2,100	1,590	JOR FRENCH INSUP.	5.6	7.61	1	100	197	1.98	1.97	0.01	
INSURANCE SECTOR TOTALS			INDEX: 122.79	%CHG: -0.05		1	100	197			
2,050	1,550	JOR. ELECTRIC PHW.	9.3	5.18	9	11398	21947	1.92	1.93	0.01	
+ 460	440	JORDAN INT'L. TRAD.	21.6	0.60	1	100	435	4.42	4.42	0.00	
4,000	2,890	ARAB INT'L. INV. EDUC.	10.3	0.00	35	21500	83709	3.84	3.85	0.01	
1,050	740	JORDAN EXPAT. INV.	9	0.00	1	250	250	1.05	1.00	0.05	
680	640	UNION LAB. DEV.	9	0.00	2	5008	3575	0.71	0.71	0.00	
SERVICE SECTOR TOTALS			INDEX: 117.44	%CHG: +0.71		49	39148	109901			
11,160	9,200	JOR. PETROL. REFINERY	10.1	8.51	7	1261	13427	10.44	10.45	0.01	
4,700	3,400	ARAB PHARM. MANF.	11.4	4.83	11	5450	22571	4.16	4.14	0.02	
7,700	1,800	GENERAL MINING	9	0.00	1	500	1090	2.24	2.18	0.06	
6,000	4,400	DAP ALDWA AL. DIV.	13.9	4.40	4	8500	9431	5.68	5.44	0.24	
650	440	LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	9.3	0.00	5	1600	1620	4.44	4.44	0.00	
S 3,000	1,160	WATL. CABLE WIRE. NPAC	29.9	0.00	1	500	1210	1.24	1.24	0.00	
860	530	JOR. SULPHO-CHEM	9	0.00	3	2000	1104	0.86	0.86	0.00	
S 1,800	820	UNIV. MOINS. INDS.	9	0.26	1	6200	5028	8.82	8.82	0.00	
970	810	WID. CABLE CO.	16.3	3.1	1	446	56	0.90	0.89	0.01	
840	570	WID. EAST COMPLEX	7.5	16.39	3	8700	5222	6.00	6.61	0.61	
INDUSTRIAL SECTOR TOTALS			INDEX: 115.53	%CHG: +0.71		42	34511	62203			
GRAND TOTAL			INDEX: 168.33	%CHG: -0.54		137	110669	248574			
PARALLEL MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR SATURDAY 03/01/1998											
610	340	JOR. TRADE FAC.	9.3	0.00	1	300	105	0.36	0.35	0.01	
570	360	ARAB FIR. INVEST.	9	0.00	1	200	94	0.48	0.47	0.01	
M 1,000	1,000	JOR. NAT. TRAD. HOLDING	9	0.00	3	25000	26520	1.00	1.05	0.05	
450	440	ARAB FOOD & MED.	0.00	0	1	2150	7068	4.55	4.45	0.10	
750	380	NATL. MULT. ENG. NAHICO	9	0.00	27	48750	23428	49	49	0.00	
+ 470	280	INDS. ENG.	9	0.00	6	32000	9098	0.28	0.27	0.01	

Agassi hoping to return to top 10

ADELAIDE (AFP) — Former World No. 1 Andre Agassi said Saturday that a return to the top echelon of tennis was within his grasp.

Agassi, whose ranking has dipped to 110, said it would not take him long to retrieve his best form as he attempts to regain a top-10 ranking in world tennis.

Agassi, 27, was speaking after his arrival here for next week's Australian men's hardcourt tournament, a curtain-raiser for the Australian Open in Melbourne which starts on January 19.

"It is going to require getting my match toughness back, which I don't think is going to take me very long now that I've got my fitness back," said Agassi, who has won the Wimbledon, U.S. and Australian Open crowns.

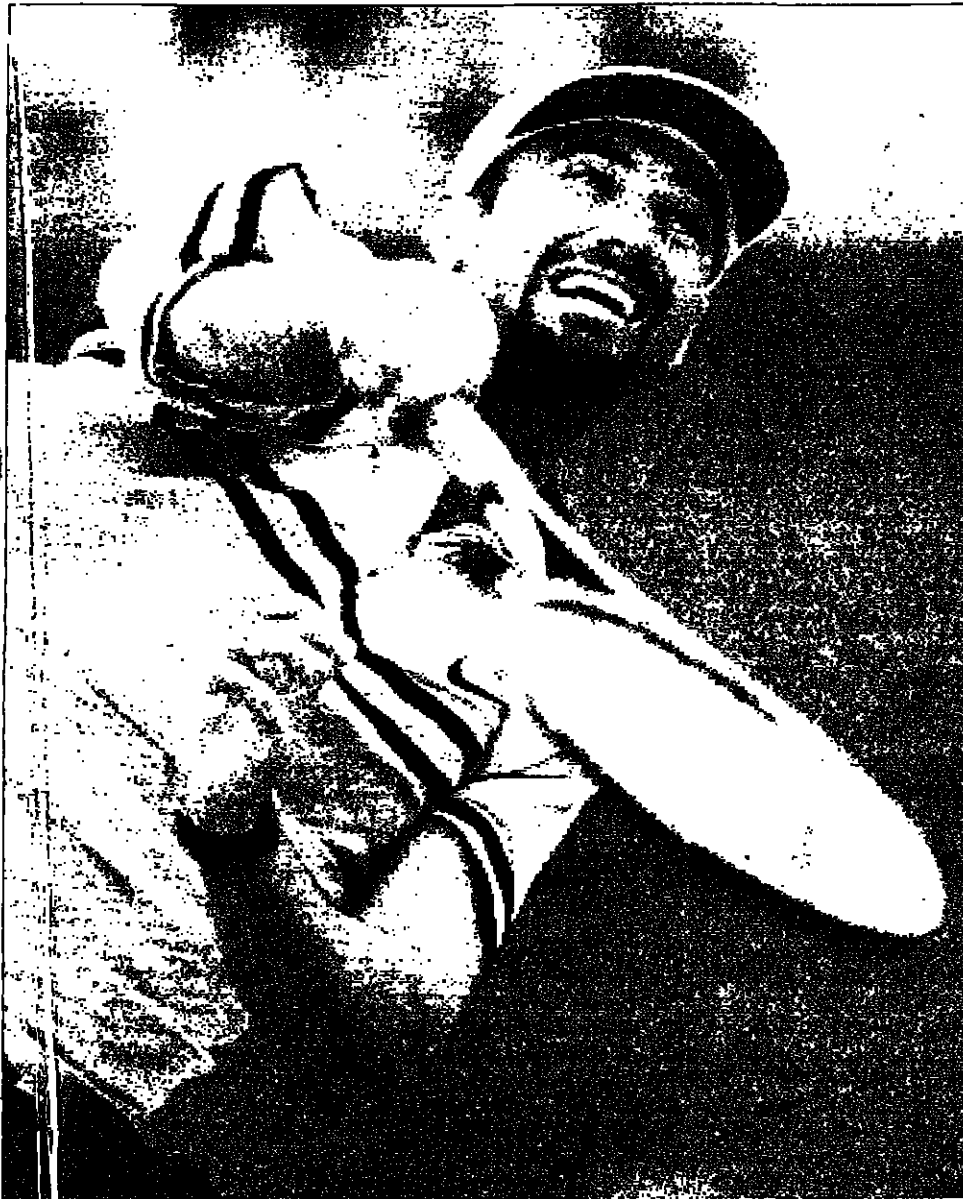
Agassi headed straight for the practice court and later said he felt fit and ready to return to top-level tennis after finding his way on the peripheral challenger circuit.

"I feel really good. It's nice to be out here feeling that strong and ready to go," he said.

"My game is right there, my shots are there. With the right amount of matches I can get it right up there."

"It's nice to be out here for real reasons. I want to be out here and do well and I want to work hard."

Agassi will play Armenian Sargis Sargsian in the first round on Tuesday and has a potential



Andre Agassi

second round match against the tournament's eighth seed Dominic Hrbaty of Slovakia, his practice part-

ner Saturday.

The hardcourt championship has also attracted world No. 4 Jonas

Bjorkman, former World No. 1 Jim Courier and French Open champion Gustavo Kuerten of Brazil.

Kuerten takes Australian wild card

ADELAIDE, Australia (AP) — French Open Tennis champion Gustavo Kuerten accepted a wild card Thursday to play in next week's Australian men's hardcourt championships.

The Brazilian took the wild card after it was offered to him following the withdrawal from the event of Australia's Mark Philippoussis because of a shoulder injury.

Tournament director Colin Stubbs said Kuerten's manager approached him about playing in Adelaide on Tuesday.

The hardcourt starts on Monday and it was expected Kuerten would play his first-round match Tuesday evening.

World fourth-ranked Jonas Bjorkman is the top seed in the tournament.

Philippoussis, meanwhile, said he was a certain starter for the Australian Open that begins on Jan. 19 in Melbourne.

Gavin Hopper, who guided Philippoussis through his most successful 12 months, will have sole responsibility for coaching the Melbourne player.

Philippoussis will also bring American coach Nick Bollettieri back on board as a consultant as well as Australian Davis Cup coach Tony Roche.



Glasgow Celtic's Alan Stubbs holds off a challenge from Glasgow Rangers' defender Stuart McCall (L) in the Premier division match at Celtic Park in Glasgow. Celtic won the match 2-0 (Reuters photo)

Celtic put an end to Rangers jinx

GLASGOW (AFP) — Two superb goals by Paul Lambert and Craig Burley gave Celtic a 2-0 win over Rangers here on Friday — their first win in the last 10 Scottish Premier Division meetings with their bitter city rivals.

Burley, who joined from Chelsea in the summer, hit an excellent 66th minute opener after Lambert had released him just outside the box while the latter, who joined from European Cup winners Borussia Dortmund late last year, flashed home a superb 30-yard effort with five minutes to go.

Celtic, who hadn't beaten Rangers since April 1995, move up to second a point behind Rangers, who led the league by 14 points at the same stage last season, and Hearts, who drew 2-2 in the Edinburgh derby on

Thursday, are third equal on points with Celtic but with an inferior goal difference.

"It was a lucky goal. I just hit it perfectly and it flew into the net. I'm not likely to repeat that!" Lambert said about his first goal for the club.

Rangers manager Walter Smith, who is in his final season as boss of the club, was magnanimous in defeat. "Celtic deserved their win today. We can have no complaints and we'll just have to bounce back from this in our next match if we're to win a record 10th title in a row," Smith said.

Celtic's Dutch boss Wim Jansen, in his first season at the club, was delighted with his side's performance, particularly after they lost to lowly St Johnstone over Christmas.

"I am very satisfied with

our performance particularly in the second-half and this puts us back on track to challenge for the title," Jansen said.

Rangers had looked the livelier party in the opening stages but for all the wizardry of Danish playmaker Brian Laudrup the Celtic defence easily handled their leading scorer Marco Negri who never looked likely to add to his 33 goals in his first season in Scotland.

Rangers had 'keeper Andy Goram to thank for restricting the margin as he twice thwarted Celtic's new Norwegian signing Harald Brautbakke with stunning blocks but not even the second-half introduction of England playmaker Paul Gascoigne, returning after a five match suspension, could bring Rangers back into the game.

Lattek could plot German downfall with Iran coaching job

BONN (AFP) — German coaching legend Udo Lattek may find himself plotting his compatriots' World Cup downfall if he accepts an offer to coach group opponents Iran, he revealed Friday.

The Iranians are desperate for Lattek to take the helm as early as next Monday to boost their France 98 campaign, where they face Germany, Yugoslavia and the United States in Group F.

And although Lattek, a Bundesliga title winner with Bayern Munich and Borussia Moenchengladbach, says that "things won't happen as quickly as that," the 62-year-old told mass circulation daily Bild he was thinking seriously about taking the job.

Lattek has been working as a television commentator in recent seasons after leaving Schalke in 1993 and now wants a month to consider his future.

He travelled to Tehran last week to talk terms with Iranian federation president Mohsen Safai-Farahani and said he was "warmly received."

Lattek made both Bayern and Moenchengladbach household names in Europe in the 1970s but never coached the national side.

He said he was not looking to tie himself down to the Iranian post beyond the World Cup, although "the people there would like to work with me long-term."

"Ninety-nine per cent of coaches would immediately go over there with their eyes closed. But it's not a question of money — I am independent," he stressed, while confirming the financial terms on offer were attractive.

The German would succeed Brazilian Valdir Vieira, whom the Iranians have been looking to replace despite his leading them to the finals as they seek a higher-profile figure.

Vieira's future looked to be secure last month after Iran received a quadruple snub in their search for a replacement.

Carlos Bilardo, who coached Argentina to the 1986 title, former Barcelona boss Johan Cruyff, Yugoslavian Bora Milutinovic — sacked by Mexico — and Portuguese coach Eduardo Vingaard all turned the job down.

Asian soccer seeks balance between sponsors, freedom

SINGAPORE (AP) — Asian soccer will seek more corporate money to bolster its growth but will avoid losing control to television and sponsors, the sport's top regional official said Friday.

"We need television. We need sponsors. But we want healthy relationships," said Peter Velappan, general secretary of the Asian Football Confederation.

"Football is for sale but not its soul," Velappan was addressing a news conference on next week's football Expo '98, billed as the sport's first worldwide trade show. More than 600 participants are expected, including FIFA head Joseph Blatter and other top-level officials.

"We should really look at the American sports model, particularly the NBA," Velappan said. "There are a lot of lessons to be learned."

But at the same time, he added, "we don't want to be like an American game where they are totally dependent on television and sponsors."

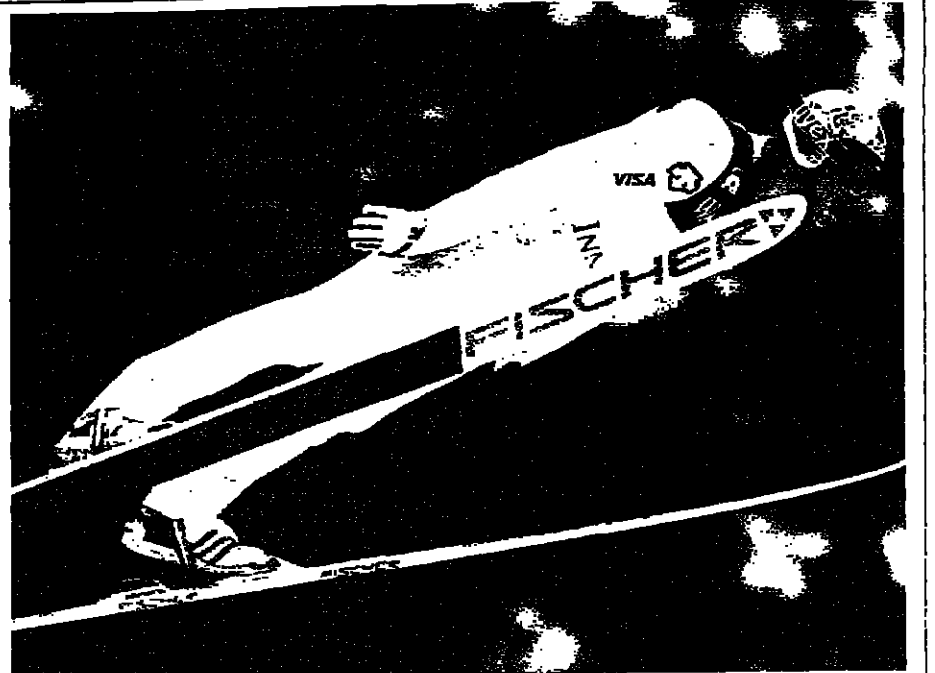
As an example, he cited the potential profits from pay-per-view television as opposed to the need to ensure that at least some high-profile games are available to the general public.

Velappan noted Asian soccer's long history. All 45 countries belong to its federation and huge sellout crowds were on hand for qualifying matches that resulted in four teams making the World Cup finals this year for the first time, he said.

But it has been hard to create a united front with the large geographical, religious, political and social differences in a region that is home to half the world's population.

"The next development decade belongs to Asia," Velappan said.

"We'd like to tap these industries. China is a new emerging market. India is a sleeping giant."



Kazuyoshi Funaki of Japan soars through the air January 3 during the qualification for Sunday's competition. The event in Innsbruck is the third station of the Four Hills ski jumping tournament. Funaki leads the overall classement after two events and also won today's qualifying with 119 metres (Reuters photo)

Tennis great Helen Wills Moody dies at 92

CARMEL, California (AP) — Tennis great Helen Wills Moody, who won eight Wimbledon titles and was one of the premier figures in America's golden era of sports, has died, she was 92.

Moody died at Carmel Convalescent Hospital, which would not disclose the cause of death.

Known for hitting the ball harder than any woman, she ruled her sport in the 1920s and '30s and her trademark white eye shade became an enduring tennis fad.

Moody, nicknamed "little miss poker face" and "queen Helen," won 31 major titles including doubles and mixed doubles.

Wimbledon, she captured seven singles U.S. crowns and four French championships.

She won her first U.S. championship in 1923 and retired after winning Wimbledon in 1938. She was 18-2 in singles at the Wightman Cup, a women's team event between Britain and the United States.

Moody learned the game without ever taking a lesson — picking it up from watching players at the Berkeley Tennis Club.

"Children are great imitators," she said in a 1984 interview with the Monterey County Herald. "I watched the

seniors play and the visiting Australian champions."

One year after she started playing at age 14, she won the first of her two U.S. junior titles. She was just 17 in 1923, when she won the U.S. women's singles championship — the youngest champion at the time.

She won an Olympic gold medal in Paris in 1924, the last time tennis was an Olympic sport until it returned at the 1988 Seoul Games. She was inducted into the international tennis hall of fame in 1959 and was the associated press female athlete of the year in 1935.

Moody played a power game, slamming both forehand and backhand shots the length of the court, her serious demeanour led to her "poker face" nickname.

"She never showed any expression on the court, nobody knew what she was thinking," said Margaret Osborne Dupont, a 1947 Wimbledon champ.

Moody led a reclusive life after she retired, causing tennis great Alice Marble to dub her the "Greta Garbo of tennis."

Her game drew her many admirers, including actor Charlie Chaplin, who when asked to name the most

beautiful thing he had ever seen, said: "the movement of Helen Wills playing tennis."

She wrote three books, including her autobiography "15-30: the story of a tennis player," published in 1937. In the 1920s, she also wrote a tennis instruction book and a mystery, "Death Serves An Ace."

She followed tennis closely in her later years, watching matches on television.

"She admired Martina Navratilova greatly as a tennis player who broke her record," Los Angeles

Tennis Historian Jeanne Cherry said. "I once asked her how she felt about Martina breaking her record, and she said, 'well, you know, she pumps iron.'"

She divorced in 1937 and two years later remarried and took the name Helen Wills Moody Roark. She was also an accomplished artist, with her drawings and paintings exhibited in the United States and abroad.

There are no survivors, her ashes will be scattered at sea and there will be no service.

CINEMA TEL: 63114	CINEMA TEL: 63114	CINEMA TEL: 699136	CINEMA TEL: 677430	CINEMA TEL: 677430	CINEMA TEL: 677430	CINEMA TEL: 677430	Risham Yanes Theatre TEL: 625155
PHILADELPHIA "1"	PHILADELPHIA "2"	PLAZA	CONCORD	GALLERIA 1	GALLERIA 2		
George Clooney & Nicole Kidman ... in THE PEACEMAKER Shows: 12:15, 2:15, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	Mickey Rourke & Angie Everhart ... in ANOTHER 9-1/2 WEEKS Shows: 12:15, 2:15, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	Nicholas Cage ... in CON AIR Shows: 12:30, 6:30 AL MASEER (Arabic) Nour Al Sharif Shows: 8:30, 10:45 HERCULES Shows: 2:00 p.m.	CONCORD "1" MR. BEAN Shows: 12:15, 2:15 MURDER 1600 Shows: 6:30, 8:30, 10:30 CONCORD "2" MR. BEAN Shows: 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	ABDOUN Demi Moore ... in THE JUROR Shows: 2:00, 6:30 GEORGE OF THE JUNGLE Shows: 2:00, 6:30	ABDOUN Harrison Ford ... in AIR FORCE ONE Shows: 2:00, 6:15, 8:30, 10:45		NOW ON DAILY THE GOVERNMENT IN THE SERVICE OF PEOPLE Starring Hisham Yanes and Anah Dabbas For reservations call: 640155, 625155

Sports

Jordan Times, Sunday, January 4, 1998 11

Ahli clinch handball crown

By Roufan Nahhas
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Al Ahli Club were crowned champions of the First Division Handball Championship which was concluded over the New Year weekend after a 37-32 (19-16) win over titleholders Al Arabi.

Al Ahli topped the standings with 27 points and finished the competition with an unbeaten record to clinch their fourth title in five years.

Al Salt came in the second place with 23 points and two losses and were able to win their last match after a 37-26 (20-12) win over seventh placed Kufranjeh.

FINAL STANDINGS						
Team	W	D	L	Gf	Ga	Pts
Al Ahli	13	1	-	454	362	27
Salt	11	1	2	461	361	23
Arabi	11	-	3	488	395	22
Hussein	7	1	6	412	391	15
Amman	5	1	8	392	429	11
Umm Jozeh	3	1	10	341	413	7
Kufranjeh	2	1	11	382	482	5
Y. Shounch	1	-	13	312	409	2

Kufroum — withdrew

Al Arabi came in third place with 22 points after losing three matches.

The event witnessed a heated competition between Al Ahli and Al Salt as both teams fought hard for the title.

Al Ahli, however, took

control of the event after beating Al Salt 32-24 (14-10).

Kufranjeh and Yarmouk Al Shounch finished among the last two while Kufroum withdrew and the trio were relegated to the Second Division.



Los Angeles Lakers' Shaquille O'Neal (L), back after a muscle injury suffered in November, pressures Atlanta Hawks' Christian Laettner in the first half of their NBA game, January 2 in Inglewood (Reuters photo)

NBA RESULTS

Boston	93	Minnesota	89
Indiana	99	Washington	81
Charlotte	99	Miami	88 (OT)
New Jersey	103	New York	98
Cleveland	81	Orlando	71
Detroit	91	Toronto	88
Chicago	114	Milwaukee	100
San Antonio	85	Portland	69
Houston	116	Denver	115 (OT)
Phoenix	92	Dallas	85
Seattle	90	Philadelphia	73
LA Clippers	94	Golden State	79
LA Lakers	116	Atlanta	106
Sacramento	94	Vancouver	80

World Swimming Championships
Talbot still wary of Chinese

PERTH (AP) — Australian coach Don Talbot is expecting top performances from Chinese swimmers at the World Championships, despite reports that Chinese officials are pessimistic.

"I would guess they're going to be strong — it would be stupid of us to assume that they're not going to be strong and we have to expect they're going to produce their absolute best," Talbot said Friday.

Talbot dismissed Chinese top coach Zhou Ming's downbeat assessment of his squad's hopes for Perth as farcical.

"You can't believe a word they say," Talbot said. "There's so much game-playing going on, it's mind boggling and it just makes a farce of the whole sport."

"I'm not thinking about it any more and we're talking that way to the team. Just don't think about it, do your job and let's see what happens when we get there."

Zhou said his top female swimmer, Atlanta gold medalist Le Jingyi, was suffering from burnout and had little chance of a strong performance at the world titles that begin Jan. 7.

He said China's 16-woman, 8-man team in Perth could not expect to perform as well as they did in the national games in Shanghai in October where umbling records rekindled speculation of performance-enhancing drug abuse.

Their performances probably will not be as good as those made at the

eight national games, but they will not be as ordinary as in the Atlanta Games," Zhou told Shanghai's Wenhui daily newspaper.

On a report that he would only swim in the relay, Talbot said: "It would be funny if it wasn't so serious."

The Chinese were initially expected to arrive in Perth on Saturday but are now scheduled to arrive on Jan. 8, three days before the main races begin in the pool.

Talbot, meanwhile, said he was "stunned" that his German counterpart admitted that he had given drugs to his athletes.

Talbot said there was no way that Australian swimming would back him if he had admitted — as Winfried Leopold had done — involvement in performance-enhancing drugs.

"There wouldn't be a chance in hell that Australian swimming would do that, I'm sure," Talbot said.

"It's stunning to me. I can't believe all this is happening."

On arrival in Perth on Thursday, Leopold made a public apology for giving

performance-enhancing drugs to swimmers in the former East Germany, but said he was forced to do it under the authoritarian regime.

German Swimming Federation President Ruediger Tetow said Leopold retained his support and pointed out he had long been open about his involvement with doping under the old regime, admitting it as far back as 1991.

Talbot said there was justifiable anger around the world over Olympic medals lost to East German drug cheats.

"There are some pretty indignant swimmers in this country and in the rest of the world and I think rightly so," Talbot said.

"Now to bring themselves out, there are a lot of people who feel very badly done by because they've been cheated out — today it means money — and also out of gold medals."

"It's pretty upsetting for athletes who commit their lives to do this sort of thing."

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Slovak Republic in Hopman Cup

PERTH, Australia (AFP) — The Slovak Republic have qualified to meet Spain, the tournament favorites, in an early round match at the 900,000 Australian dollars (\$587,880) Hopman Cup tennis mixed teams tournament here.

In a pre-competition play-off here Saturday, the Slovak Republic's Karina Habsudova and Karol Kucera proved too strong for Romania's Irina Spirlea and Dinu Pescariu, winning 2-1.

In the women's singles, Habsudova fought back after an early setback to defeat Spirlea in three sets, 3-6, 6-4, 6-2. Then Kucera clinched the match when he overwhelmed Pescariu 6-1, 6-2 in straight sets in the men's singles.

In the mixed doubles, Romania gained some consolation when Pescariu and Spirlea beat Kucera and Habsudova 6-4, 4-6 and 8-6 in a tiebreaker.

Habsudova and Kucera will come up against Spain's Arantxa Sanchez Vicario and Carlos Moya, ranked ninth and seventh in the world respectively, on Monday.

The tournament proper starts Sunday when Australia's Patrick Rafter, ranked second in the world, and Annabel Ellwood, clash with Sweden's Thomas Enqvist and Asa Carlsson.

Australia are seeded number four, while the Swedes are unseeded.

Karpov wins first game against Anand in FIDE final

LAUSANNE, Switzerland (AFP) — Reigning champion Anatoly Karpov of Russia won the first of six games against India's Viswanathan Anand in the final of the World Chess Federation (FIDE) tournament here on Friday.

Anand conceded defeat after more than six hours and 108 moves.

Karpov, 46 and Anand, 28 will play their second game on Saturday.

Anand won the right to challenge for the world crown after defeating Britain's Michael Adams in a play-off on Tuesday in the Dutch city of Groningen.

The title clash in Lausanne is being held under a new six-game formula, running until January 9 at the Olympic Museum on the banks of Lake Geneva.

In the event of a draw after six matches, a "tie-break" game will be held to decide the winner, who will receive \$1.37 million. The loser gets \$768,000.



Reigning Russian World chess champion Anatoly Karpov thinks about his next move during the first game at the World Championships in Lausanne. Karpov is playing against Indian challenger Viswanathan Anand. The winner of the title will be the player who wins three games first (Reuters photo)

For the 49ers, the second time may be the hardest

NEW YORK (AP) — Four weeks ago, the San Francisco 49ers finally got the win they craved, beating the Minnesota Vikings 28-17.

It was the 49ers' first win over a winning team — albeit one that was losing its fourth of five straight. For a team that had cruised through what was probably the National Football League's worst division — the National Football Conference West — it was some comfort, and they went out the next week and beat Denver, another winner.

Now the 49ers (13-3) have to do it again with the added threat that if they lose, their season is over. They will be facing a team with six new defensive starters, four of them rookies, who helped the Vikings (10-7) rebound last week from 16-point deficit to beat the New York Giants.

"Right now we're improving defensively very quickly," said Minnesota coach Dennis Green. "We're showing a lot of speed and mobility and explosiveness defensively, and I think we're going to get better each week."

The 49ers-Vikings game is one of four involving the eight teams left in the Super Bowl sweepstakes. It comes following the opening game of the week-

end, New England at Pittsburgh in a meeting of the last two American Football Conference Super Bowl representatives. The Sunday games are both divisional rematches — first Tampa Bay at Green Bay in the NFC, then Denver at Kansas City.

The 49ers enter the game with the Vikings as one of the shakier top seeds this decade in the NFC, where only once since 1990 the top two seeds have failed to make the conference championship game. That was two years ago, when Green Bay went to San Francisco as the third seed and beat the second-seeded 49ers.

One problem for San Francisco in this one: the absence of Garrison Hearst, whose broken collarbone will keep him idle. He had injected new life into the 49ers running game before getting hurt in a loss to Kansas City five weeks ago.

"We're going to have a wide-open game plan, but you've got to be able to run the football. There's no getting around that," says 49ers coach Steve Mariucci.

Denver Broncos (13-4) at Kansas City Chiefs (13-3): This is the first playoff game between these two, although they've met 75 times. It's an increasingly

bitter rivalry — they split this year in games marked by scuffling and late hits on both sides.

The Broncos won the season-opener 19-3 at Mile High Stadium. Then the Chiefs got them at home and beat the Broncos 24-22 at arrowhead stadium on Nov. 16, reversing the fortunes of both.

The Chiefs surged by the Broncos a month later to clinch the AFC West and home field in the conference. Denver was forced to beat Jacksonville 42-17 just to reach arrowhead.

The Chiefs are rested, and quarterback Elvis Grbac — who missed most of the season's final seven games with a separated shoulder — is healthy again.

Denver's biggest question mark is all-pro running back Terrell Davis, who gained 184 yards last week, then left with bruised ribs late in the third quarter, but

he's likely to start.

New England Patriots (11-6) at Pittsburgh Steelers (11-5): Last season, these teams met at the same stage, and the Patriots won 28-3 in Foxboro. Three weeks ago, again in Foxboro, the Steelers won 24-21 in overtime in a game new England appeared to have locked up before Drew Bledsoe threw an interception to defensive lineman Kevin Henry with just over two minutes left in regulation.

New England running back Curtis Martin is still hampered by a groin pull. But defense wins in the postseason, and the Patriots have been playing their best defense the last month.

They also have some history on their side. Three years ago, San Diego upset Pittsburgh at three rivers stadium to advance to the Super Bowl. Two years ago, Indianapolis

was the last seed in the conference, barely missed on a desperation pass on the final play of the AFC title game in Pittsburgh.

Tampa Bay Buccaneers (11-6) at Green Bay Packers (13-3): History is against the Bucs, who won for only the second time in post season play last Sunday against Detroit.

Green Bay, which beat Tampa Bay 21-16 and 17-6 during the regular season, has won 26 straight — including three playoff games — at Lambeau Field.

And the Bucs have never won in temperatures under 42 degrees (5.56 Celsius), unheard of warmth in Green Bay, Wisconsin in January.

So the Packers are using their own example — the upset in San Francisco two years ago.

"It's the same scenario," says Brett Favre.

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Over 100,000 Palestinians attend prayers at Al Aqsa

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — Over 100,000 Palestinians flocked to Jerusalem's Al Aqsa Mosque compound to attend the first weekly Friday prayers of Ramadan as Israeli police were on high alert in the holy city.

Israeli police allowed Palestinians to enter Jerusalem from the West Bank for the prayers and deployed hundreds of reinforcements in the area to prevent violence by Palestinians and provocations by Jewish extremists.

In his sermon to worshippers, Sheikh Hamed Al Beitawi issued a dire warning to Israel after two Jewish extremists were arrested last week for planning to desecrate Al Aqsa, Islam's third holiest site in Jerusalem's old city.

"Al Aqsa is in danger. Israel, its people, its government and especially [Israeli Prime Minister] Benjamin Netanyahu have a dangerous intention to destroy Al Aqsa," Sheikh Beitawi said.

"But I send them a warning message: the destruction of Al Aqsa will mean the destruction of Israel. We will not stay silent over any attempt on our holy places," he said.

Israeli police 12 days ago arrested two Jewish extremists for plotting to throw the head of a pig — considered an unclean animal by Muslims and Jews — on to the mosque compound during Ramadan in hopes of sparking riots.

Security forces have warned of a possible upsurge of provocations by far-right Jewish groups hoping to scuttle a promised army withdrawal in the West Bank, and on Wednesday a court banned one underground extremist group.

Israeli police, armed with batons and riot gear, were deployed over the walls and alleyways of the old city and throughout Arab east Jerusalem.

On the occasion of the first weekly prayers for

Ramadan, the Holy Month when Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset, Israel lifted the ban on West Bank Palestinians from entering Jerusalem for most of the morning.

"We put no limit on the numbers who could enter Jerusalem," said a police spokesman.

Al Aqsa officials put the number of worshippers who attended the prayers at 150,000, although Israeli police put the number at 100,000.

"Every nook and cranny of the compound was full. There has never been a crowd like this," said one of the gatekeepers into the compound.

An hour before the noon prayers, police reimposed the ban, blocking hundreds of late-comers from entering Jerusalem.

At Jerusalem's northern entrance, over 1,000 Palestinians prevented from entering staged a protest, with youths throwing stones at soldiers, witnesses said.

Police beat several people while dispersing the crowd and arrested one demonstrator, the witnesses said.

Arab east Jerusalem, occupied and illegally annexed by Israel in 1967, has been closed to Palestinians in the West Bank off and on since 1993 and completely closed since January 1996.

But throughout the morning, busloads of Palestinians from throughout the West Bank poured into the old city.

"I have not set foot in Jerusalem in over two years," said Riad Abu Mahamid, 63, a farmer from a village near Nablus. "But I wanted to come today to show we support Jerusalem," he said.

"But there are so many police around. It's like being under a prison guard. I am just coming to pray. I'm not coming to cause trouble," he said, leading his wife and three grandchildren into the mosque.

Netanyahu tries to keep Levy from resigning

TEL AVIV (AP) — With Israel's budget flap threatening to create new delays in the peace process, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu tried Friday to come up with more money for the poor and unemployed and keep his shaky coalition from unravelling.

Mr. Netanyahu postponed a vote on Israel's 1998 budget until Monday after Foreign Minister David Levy — the government's leading supporter of the peace process — said he would resign unless social spending was increased.

"The prime minister genuinely wants to keep David in the government," Moshe

Lyon, director of the prime minister's office, said on Israel Radio. "We think we can find a solution."

Mr. Netanyahu said he

was working with Finance Minister Yaakov Neeman to find ways to resolve the crisis.

Mr. Levy's Geshet faction controls five of the coalition's 66 seats.

In the 120-seat parliament, and his resignation would likely cause other moderates to desert as well.

Even if the government did not fall, Mr. Levy's departure would make it significantly harder for Mr. Netanyahu to win support for the West Bank troop pullback he has "promised" the Palestinians and United States.

Mr. Netanyahu was considering asking U.S. envoy Dennis Ross to postpone his visit to the region, officials in the prime minister's office said. Mr. Ross was due to arrive on Monday.

the same day as the budget vote.

Hanan Ashrawi, Palestinian minister of higher education, complained after a cabinet meeting Friday night that the peace process was being held hostage to Israeli domestic politics.

Referring to Mr. Netanyahu's promises to increase funding to Jewish settlers in the West Bank in order to win backing for his budget, Dr. Ashrawi said the Israeli prime minister "has decided to cast his lot with the extremists. This serves a serious strike to the peace process."

Top Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said Mr. Ross was still expected to arrive Monday and meet with Palestinian President Yasser Arafat on Monday night.

Orthodox rabbis to publish list of 'real Jews'

TEL AVIV (AFP) — A committee of ultra-Orthodox rabbis in Israel plans to publish lists of "real Jews" to ensure against marriages with people whose Jewishness is in doubt, religious officials said Friday.

The committee intends to issue a book containing lists of people who are 100 per cent Jewish, based on family trees or conversions accepted by the ultra-Orthodox community.

Ultra-Orthodox Jews claim only a small minority of the 700,000 immigrants from the former Soviet Union in recent years are Jews according to halakha, or Jewish law, although Israeli authorities disagree.

In addition, the ultra-Orthodox do not accept most conversions by Reform or Conservative rabbis, who are outside the stream of Orthodox Judaism.

Rabbi Nahum Eisenstein, an ultra-Orthodox rabbi on the committee, told reporters that "70 per cent of the Jews coming from the former Soviet Union are not Jews" and that only one per cent of conversions to Judaism are genuine.

The book has received the blessing of a number of spiritual leaders of the ultra-Orthodox Ashkenazi Jews of European origin, who make up six per cent of Israel's population.

"This announcement should be seen as an act of protest, because in practice it's very difficult to make these lists," said Rabbi Henri Kahn, who runs the Jewish magazine Kuntrass.

They would have to investigate the backgrounds of five million Israelis plus those of the diaspora Jews, a task the committee is ill-equipped to do, he said.

In any case, members of ultra-Orthodox communities marry almost exclusively among themselves.



AUSTRIAN JUMP: A ski-jumper appears to float over the mountains surrounding the city of Innsbruck during the practice for Sunday's competition on the Berg Isel jump, Saturday. The event in Innsbruck is the third of the Four Hills ski jumping tournament (Reuters photo)

Iraqi Kurd faction makes Ramadan peace proposal

ANKARA (AFP) — The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) made a Ramadan peace offer to its bitter rival the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) Saturday to put an end to factional fighting which has killed nearly 3,000 people in northern Iraq since 1994.

In a broadcast on PUK radio, the movement's leader Jalal Talabani, called for "a halt to the civil war and the establishment of a permanent climate of democracy in the region," the Turkish news agency Anatolian reported.

"On the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan, I extend a fraternal hand to [KDP leader] Massoud Barzani," the PUK leader said.

He suggested that as a first step the rival factions exchange prisoners and take steps to allow civilians displaced in recent fighting to return to their homes.

"For the restoration of peace in the northern Iraq, all the parties must stop fighting and move towards a union in order to form an independent government," he said.

The two Kurdish factions have controlled much of northern Iraq since the end of the 1991 Gulf war.

A joint administration collapsed in 1994 as a result of a dispute over the sharing of taxes

Turkish troops kill 13 Kurdish rebels

ANKARA (AFP) — Turkish army troops have killed 13 separatist Kurdish rebels in recent fighting in the country's troubled southeast, government officials said Friday.

The 13 members of the outlawed Kurdistan Labour Party (PKK) were killed in two separate clashes in the provinces of Hakkari, near on Iraqi and Iranian borders, and Diyarbakir, the southeast's regional governorship said in a statement. It did not say when the fighting took place.

More than 27,000 people have been killed in PKK-related violence in southeast Turkey since 1984 when the rebels launched their armed campaign for a Kurdish homeland.

The latest fighting report came as hundreds of Turkish Kurds, together with hundreds of other refugees from Iraq and Asian countries, illegally fled to Italy on board two ships since last week.

levied on trade across the Turkish border, the region's main source of revenue."

A ceasefire brokered in 1996 by Britain, Turkey and the United States broke down last year.

Since May, the KDP has been allied with Ankara in its battle against the Kurdish Labour Party which it accuses of using rear bases in Iraq in its bloody 14-year-old campaign for self-rule for Turkey's Kurds.

The PUK says the Turkish forces have also intervened

against it on the KDP's behalf.

The KDP leader has called for Baghdad to broker a settlement in northern Iraq.

"Baghdad is the centre of government and in the end our problems will be solved in Baghdad," he said last month.

The KDP's dialogue with the Iraqi government of Saddam Hussein has been an open secret since their August 1996 alliance, which enabled Mr. Barzani to recapture the city Erbil from the PUK.

Khamenei lashes out at U.S., Khatami warned against dialogue

TEHRAN (AP) — Iran's spiritual leader Ali Khamenei lashed out at the United States on Friday, accusing it of trying to destabilise the Islamic Republic.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's attack on the U.S. comes days before President Mohammad Khatami is expected to address the American people.

Ayatollah Khamenei's tone contrasted sharply with President Khatami's conciliatory position and illustrated the power struggle between hard line and moderate factions in the ruling hierarchy.

"They [U.S.] want to build a gap between the people and Iranian leaders and they want Iran to turn to the West and the United States," Ayatollah Khamenei said in a Friday prayer sermon here.

He accused Western nations of using "guileful propaganda tricks" against Iran. "They

would like to bring about instability and insecurity in the nation," he said.

Mr. Khatami said last month that he hoped to have a dialogue with "the great American people" in the not too distant future.

Cable News Network said Friday that Mr. Khatami will address Americans in an interview with the television station on Wednesday.

A hard-line newspaper, however, downplayed such an address.

"A dialogue with the American nation certainly does not mean opening the door to the American government," the daily Qods said in an editorial Thursday.

"There are no signs of change in the position of the leader (Ayatollah Khamenei) and the Iranian nation regarding relations with America," the paper said.

It said Ayatollah Khamenei had the last word on foreign policy and that President Khatami would act according to the policies "dictated by the leader."

Ayatollah Khamenei leads a powerful faction in the government that vehemently opposes relations with the U.S.

Although Mr. Khatami has limited room to manoeuvre, he is very popular among Iranians — who would generally welcome a resumption of ties with the U.S.

Also Friday, an Iranian legislator said he planned to disclose the names of alleged agents working for the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency in Iran.

Mohammad Reza Fakher said the ambassador of "the former Soviet Union" had shown him the agents' identity cards.



Man rings dog as telephone goes missing

LONDON (AFP) — When Tony Dangerfield dialled his mobile telephone after it vanished from underneath the Christmas tree, he hardly expected his girlfriend's dog to come on the line. Not with a bark, but with a ring. For Charlie, a hefty bloodhound, had sniffed out the tasty-looking package put under the tree by Tony's girlfriend, and thought the treat was too good to miss. He clawed his way into the box and ate the telephone, according to The Sun daily. The couple took Charlie to the vet to check if he needed treatment but, 24 hours after his take-away meal, the telephone emerged when mother nature called.

Spanish ostriches in vanishing act

PAMPLONA (AFP) — Daring but choosy thieves smuggled 100 ostriches from a farm in northern Spain, possibly for selling as a delicacy. They were daring because ostriches can seriously injure humans if they are not handled correctly, the local daily reported. Also, the thieves would have needed at least four trucks to transport their haul, yet managed to escape unnoticed. And they were picky, choosing only those ostriches aged between six and eight months — nearly the age at which they are slaughtered for their meat. The farm at Los Arcos had 750 ostriches before the theft, supposedly guarded by five guard-dogs.

French anti Fast-Food group nabs McDonald's 'Ronald'

ALBI (AFP) — A mystery French group calling itself the Joyous Anti Fast-Food Network is claiming responsibility for a new attack against the McDonald's chain — the theft of its happy symbol, "Ronald" the clown. In a claim sent to McDonald's management in the southwestern Tarn region this week, the group proudly claimed the theft of a "Ronald" statue which was sawn off its pedestal outside a McDonald's outlet in the town of Albi, protesting "an invasion by a pseudo American sub-culture."

Hoffman picks his epitaph

LOS ANGELES (AFP) — Dustin Hoffman is known as the ultimate perfectionist. He goes over scripts line by line with the director, he is known for researching a part quite thoroughly and he will even physically become the part (like when he ate garlic cloves during "Hook" so everyone would stay away from the pirate). But Hoffman thinks his legacy may not stay around. "At 60," he says, "I'm not looking for awards. I don't think work prevails over time. The public doesn't remember. He has even picked his epitaph for his tombstone: 'It will read, 'I knew this was going to happen.' That's it."

Giant hourglass to usher Geneva into new millennium

GENEVA (AFP) — A giant hourglass is planned to usher Geneva into the new millennium, drawing on the watch-making tradition of this Swiss city. A committee named "Signe (Signal) 2000," formed by two Swiss television employees, is launching a global competition to create the hourglass, which will remain as a city monument after it is turned in the first minute of the new millennium. Every day throughout 1999, a small event will take place in the countdown to 2000, said the two committee members, David Rihs and Vincent Gonnet.